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## THE MYSTERY OF M. FELIX.

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Book the First.

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.

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### CHAPTER I.

A CRY FOR HELP FLOATS THROUGH THE NIGHT.

"HELP!"

Throughout the whole of the night chopping, shifting winds had been tearing through the streets of London, now from the north, now from the south, now from the east, now from the west, now from all points of the compass at once; which last caprice—taking place for at least the twentieth time in the course of the hour which the bells of Big Ben were striking—was enough in itself to make the policeman on the beat doubtful of his senses.

"What a chap hears in weather like this," he muttered, "and what he fancies he hears, is enough to drive him mad."

He had sufficient justification for the remark, for there were not only the wild pranks of Boreas to torment and distract him, but there was the snow which, blown in fine particles from roofs and gables, and torn from nooks where it lay huddled up in little heaps against stone walls (for the reason that being blown there by previous winds it could get no further), seemed to take a spiteful pleasure in whirling into his face, which was tingling and smarting with cold, and as a matter of course into his eyes, which it caused to run over with tears. With a vague idea that some appeal had been made officially to him as a representative of law and order, he steadied himself and stood still for a few moments, with a spiritual

cold freezing his heart even as the temporal cold was freezing his marrow.

"Help!"

The bells of Big Ben were still proclaiming the hour of midnight. If a man at such a time might have reasonably been forgiven the fancy that old Westminster's tower had been invaded by an army of malicious witches, how much more readily might he have been forgiven for not being able to fix the direction from which this cry for help proceeded? Nay, he could scarcely have been blamed for doubting that the cry was human.

For the third time:

"Help!"

Then, so far as that appeal was concerned, silence. The cry was heard no more.

The policeman still laboured under a vague impression that his duty lay somewhere in an undefined direction, and his attitude was one of strained yet bewildered attention. Suddenly he received a shock. Something touched his foot. He started back, all his nerves thrilling with an unreasonable spasm of fright. Instinctively looking down he discovered that he had been ridiculously alarmed by a miserable half-starved and nearly whole-frozen cat which, with the scanty hairs on its back sticking up in sharp points, was creeping timorously along in quest of an open door. Recovering from his alarm the policeman stamped his feet and clapped his hands vigorously to keep the circulation in them.

His beat was in the heart of Soho, and he was at that moment in Gerrard Street, in which locality human life is represented in perhaps stranger variety than can be found in any other part of this gigantic city of darkness and light. As a protection against the fierce wind he had taken refuge within the portal of the closed door of an old house which lay a little back from the regular line of buildings in the street. Little did he dream that the cry for help had proceeded from that very house, the upper portion of which was inhabited by a gentleman known as M. Felix by some, as Mr. Felix by others. Well-named apparently, for although he was not young, M. Felix was distinguished by a certain happy, light-hearted air which marked him as one who held enjoyment of the pleasures of life as a kind of religion to be devoutly observed. The lower portion of the house was occupied by the landlady, Mrs. Middlemore, who acted as housekeeper to M. Felix. It was the nightly habit of this estimable woman to go for her supper beer at half-past eleven, and return, beaming, at a few minutes after twelve.

These late hours did not interfere with the performance of her duties, because M. Felix was by no means an early riser, seldom breakfasting, indeed, before noon. Despite the inclemency of the weather, Mrs. Middlemore had not deviated on this night from her usual custom. She was a widow, without responsibilities, and no

person had a right to meddle with her affairs. Besides, as she frequently remarked, she was quite able to take care of herself.

A welcome diversion occurred to the constable who was stamping his feet within the portal of Mrs. Middlemore's street door. A brother constable sauntered up, and accosted him.

"Is that you, Wigg?"

"As much as there's left of me," replied Constable Wigg.

"You may well say that," observed the new-comer, who rejoiced in the name of Nightingale. "It's all a job to keep oneself together. What a night!"

"Bitter. I've been regularly blown off my feet."

"My case. I'm froze to a stone. The North Pole ain't in it with this, and whether I've got a nose on my face is more than I'd swear to. Anything up?"

"Nothing, except ——"

"Except what?" asked Constable Nightingale, as his comrade paused. He put his hand to his nose as he asked the question, his reference to it having inspired doubts as to his being still in possession of the feature.

"A minute or two ago," said Constable Wigg, "I had half a fancy that I heard somebody cry out 'Help!'"

"Ah. Did you go?"

"How could I? I wasn't sure, you know."

"Who could be sure of anything," remarked Constable Nightingale charitably, "on such a night?"

"Nobody. It must have been the wind."

"Not a doubt of it. If anybody told me he saw Polar bears about I shouldn't dispute with him." Then Constable Nightingale took a step forward, and glanced up at the windows of the front rooms occupied by M. Felix, in which shone a perfect blaze of light. "He must be jolly warm up there."

"Who?" inquired Constable Wigg, his eyes following his comrade's glance.

"Mr. Felix."

"And who's Mr. Felix when he's at home?"

"Why, you don't mean to say you don't know him?"

"Never heard of him. I've only been on the beat two nights."

"I forgot. He's a trump, a regular A-one-er. You're in for a good tip or two. I was on night duty here this time last year, and he behaved handsome. Tipped me at Christmas, and tipped me at New Year's. Half-a-sov. each time. And at other times, too. Altogether he was as good as between four and five pounds to me while I was here."

"That's something like," said Constable Wigg, with hope in his voice. "But"—with sudden suspicion—"why should he be so free? Anything wrong about him?"

"Not a bit of it," replied Constable Nightingale, blowing on his ice-cold fingers. "He's a diamond of the first water—a tip-top

swell, rolling in money. That's what's the matter with Mr. Felix. Don't you wish you had the same complaint? 'Constable,' said he to me, when I came on this beat last year, 'you're on night duty here, eh?' 'Yes, sir,' I answers. 'Very good,' he says; 'I live in this house'—we were standing at this very door—'and I always make it a point to look after them as looks after me.'"

"And a very good point it is," remarked Constable Wigg with growing interest, "for a gentleman to make."

"I thought so myself and I found it so. 'And I always make it a point,' says he, 'of looking after them as looks after me.' Fact is, Wigg, he comes home late sometimes, with a glass of wine too much in him, and he knows the usefulness of us. Carries a lump of money about him, and likes to feel himself safe. Never what you call drunk, you know. Just a bit sprung, as a real gentleman should be, and always with a pleasant word ready. So, whenever I met him coming home late, I'd walk behind him to his door here, and give him good-night—which he appreciated."

"Much obliged to you for the information, Nightingale."

"Ought to do these little turns for one another, Wigg. The man who was on the beat before me gave me the office, and it's only friendly for me to give it to you." Constable Nightingale looked pensively over the shoulder of his brother constable, and added, "I behaved liberal to him."

"I'll do likewise to you," said Constable Wigg, "if anything happens."

"Was sure you would, Wigg," responded Constable Nightingale briskly. "What would the force be worth if we didn't stick together? When I see Mr. Felix I'll put in a good word for you. He took a regular fancy to me, and told me if I got the beat again to come to him immediate. Once you see him, you can't miss knowing him. Tall and slim, with hair getting gray. No whiskers; only a moustache, curled. Speaks with a foreign accent—parley-voovich. His clothes fit like a glove. Patent leather boots always, except when he wears shoes; white tie generally. I remember Mrs. Middlemore —"

"Who's she?"

"His landlady. A most respectable woman—made of the right stuff. Ah, a real good sort she is! Goes out every night for her supper beer between eleven and twelve."

"I must have seen her half-an-hour ago."

"Of course you did. If it was to rain cats and dogs or snowed for a month, she wouldn't miss going. Has she come back?"

"No."

"She stops out as a rule till about this time; fond of a gossip, you know. Most of us are. She'll be here soon, if she can keep her feet. The snow's getting thicker—and listen to the wind! Let's get close to the door. Well, I remember Mrs. Middlemore

coming out to me one night, and saying, 'You're wanted up there,' meaning in Mr. Felix's rooms——"

Constable Wigg interposed. "Just now you said parleyvooish."

"So I did, and so I meant."

"Speaks with a foreign accent, you said."

"I don't deny it."

"And you keep on saying Mr. Felix."

"Well?"

"Shouldn't it be Monseer?"

"Well, perhaps; but not Monseer—Monshure."

"I give in to you, Nightingale; I'm not a French scholar."

"Let's call him Mr. for all that. Monshure twists the tongue unless you're born there."

"I'm agreeable. Call him Mr. if you like. Hallo!"

The exclamation was caused by Mrs. Middlemore's street door being suddenly opened without any preliminary warning from within, and with such swiftness and violence that the policemen almost fell through it into the passage. As they were recovering their equilibrium a man stepped out of the house, or rather stumbled out of it, in a state of great excitement. He had a crimson scarf round his neck; it was loosely tied, and the ends floated in the wind. The little bit of colour shone bright in the glare of white snow. Its wearer pulled the door after him, and hurried along the street, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and taking no notice of the policemen, who strained their eyes after him. He walked very unsteadily, and was soon out of sight.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE SPECTRE CAT.

"THAT's a rum start," said Constable Wigg. "Was it Mr. Felix?"

"No," replied Constable Nightingale; "Mr. Felix is altogether a different kind of man. Takes things more coolly. Walks slow, talks slow, thinks slow, looks at you slow. This fellow was like a flash of lightning. Did you catch sight of his face?"

"He was in such a devil of a hurry that there was no catching sight of anything except the red handkercher round his neck. There was no mistaking that. Seemed a youngish man."

"Yes. Been on a visit to Mr. Felix most likely."

"Or to some other lodger in the house," suggested Constable Wigg.

"There ain't no other," said Constable Nightingale. "Every room in it except the basement is let to Mr. Felix."

"A married man, then, with a large family."

"No," said Constable Nightingale, with a little cough. "Single. Or, perhaps, a widower. No business of ours, Wigg."

"Certainly not. Go on with your story, Nightingale. 'You're wanted up there,' says Mrs. Middlemore."

"Yes. 'You're wanted up there,' she says, meaning Mr. Felix's rooms. 'Did Mr. Felix send for me?' I asks. 'He did,' she answers. 'He rings his bell, and says, "Go for a policeman." And he'll not be sorry it's you, Mr. Nightingale, because you're a man as can be trusted.' Mrs. Middlemore's precise words. You see, Wigg, me and her ain't exactly strangers. I'm a single man, and I'm mistook if she ain't got a bit of money put by."

"You're a knowing one, Nightingale," said Constable Wigg, somewhat enviously; and it is not to the credit of human nature to state that there flashed into his mind the base idea of endeavouring to supplant his brother constable in Mrs. Middlemore's good graces. What should hinder him? He was a single man, many years younger than Constable Nightingale, and much better looking. All was fair in love and war. The "bit of money put by" was as a temptation from Lucifer.

"That's what brings me round here now and then," continued Constable Nightingale complacently. "A man might go a good deal further than Mrs. Middlemore, and fare a good deal worse. 'I suppose,' says I to her, 'there's somebody with Mr. Felix as he wants to get rid of, and as won't go?' 'I ain't at liberty to say,' she answers, 'but you're pretty near the mark. Come and see for yourself, and don't forget that Mr. Felix has got a liberal heart and hates fuss.' Upon that, Wigg, I holds my tongue, because I'm a man as knows how to, and I follows Mrs. Middlemore into the house. I'd been inside before, of course, but never upstairs, always down, and Mrs. Middlemore had told me such a lot about Mr. Felix's rooms, that I was curious to see them. 'Furnished like a palace,' Mrs. Middlemore used to say; so up the stairs I steps, Mrs. Middlemore showing the way, and I don't mind confessing that before we got to the first landing I put my arm round Mrs. Middlemore's waist—but that's neither here nor there. She stops on the landing, and knocks at the door——"

But here Constable Nightingale was compelled to pause, and to hold on tight to his comrade. The storm quite suddenly reached such a pitch of fury that the men could scarcely keep their feet, and it would have been impossible to hear a word that was spoken. It was not a fitful display of temper; so fierce grew the wind that it blew the street door open with a crash, and as the policemen were leaning against it, the consequence was that they were precipitated into the passage, and fell flat upon their backs. The reason of the door being blown open so readily was probably, as Constable Nightingale afterwards remarked, because the man who had recently left the house so hastily had not pulled it tight behind him, but the tempest was raging so furiously that it might well have made light of such an obstacle as an old street door. It was with difficulty the policemen recovered their feet, and the

strength of the wind as it rushed through the passage was so great that the idea that they would be safer inside the house than out occurred to both of them at once. To expose themselves to the fury of the elements in the open would undoubtedly have been attended with danger. Instinctively they advanced to the door, and after a struggle succeeded in shutting it. That being accomplished, they stood in the dark passage, mentally debating what they should do next.

"There's something moving," whispered Constable Wigg trembling. He was not remarkable for courage, and had a horror of darkness.

Constable Nightingale was made of sterner stuff. He promptly pulled out his dark lantern, and cast its circle of light upon the floor; and there, creeping timidly along close to the wall, they saw the miserable, half-starved cat, which had shaken Constable Wigg's nerves earlier in the night. It had taken advantage of the open street door to obtain the shelter for which it had long been seeking.

"It ain't the first time," said Constable Wigg in a vicious tone, "that this little beast has given me a turn. Just before you come up it run across me, and almost sent my heart into my mouth."

But for a mournful, fear-stricken look in its yellow eyes the light of the dark lantern seemed to deprive the wretched cat of the power of motion. It remained perfectly still, cowering to the ground. Even when Constable Wigg gave it a spiteful kick it did not move of its own volition, and it was only when the attention of the policemen was no longer directed towards it that it slunk slowly and stealthily away.

Meanwhile the tempest raged more furiously than ever outside. The shrieking wind tore through the streets, carrying devastation in its train, and the air was thick with whirling, blinding snow.

"Did you ever hear anything like it?" said Constable Nightingale.

"Never," said Constable Wigg.

"It would be madness to go out," said Constable Nightingale. "We should be dashed to pieces. Besides what good could we do? Besides, who would be likely to want us? Besides, who's to know?"

There was a world of philosophy in these reflections, which Constable Wigg was only too ready to acknowledge.

"What do you propose, Nightingale?" he asked.

"That we go down to Mrs. Middlemore's kitchen," replied Constable Nightingale, "and make ourselves comfortable. I know the way."

He led it, and Constable Wigg very cheerfully accompanied him. The kitchen was the coziest of apartments, and their hearts warmed within them as they entered it. Mrs. Middlemore, like a sensible woman, had taken the precaution to bank up the fire before she

left the house, and it needed but one touch from the poker to cause it to spring into a bright, glowing blaze. This touch was applied by Constable Nightingale, and the shadows upon walls and ceiling lept into ruddy life.

"This is something like," said Constable Wigg, stooping and warming himself.

Having no further need for his dark lantern, Constable Nightingale tucked it snugly away, and then proceeded to light a candle, which, in its flat tin candlestick and a box of matches handy, stood on the kitchen table. They were not the only articles on the table. There was no tablecloth, it is true, but what mattered that? The whitest of tablecloths would have made but a sorry supper, and in the present instance could not have added to the attractions which the lighted candle revealed. There was bread, there was butter, there was cheese, there were pickles, there was a plate of sausages, there was half a roast fowl, and there was a fine piece of cold pork. Constable Wigg's eyes wandered to the table, and became, so to speak, glued there. He was now standing with his back to the fire, and was being comfortably warmed through. Even a kitchen may become a veritable Aladdin's cave, and this was the case with Mrs. Middlemore's kitchen, in the estimation of Constable Wigg.

"If there's one thing I like better than another for supper," he said meditatively, and with pathos in his voice, "it is cold pork and pickles. And there's enough for three, Nightingale; there's enough for three."

Constable Nightingale nodded genially, and, with the air of a man familiar with his surroundings, took up a piece of butter on a knife, and put it to his mouth.

"The best fresh," he observed.

"You don't say so?" exclaimed Constable Wigg, not contentiously, but in amiable wonder.

"Taste it," said Constable Nightingale, handing his comrade the knife with a new knob of butter on it.

"It is the best fresh," said Constable Wigg. "She lives on the fat of the land." This evidence of good living and the cheerful homeliness of the kitchen strengthened his notion of supplanting Constable Nightingale in the affections of Mrs. Middlemore, but he was careful not to betray himself. "You know your way about, Nightingale. It ain't the first time you've been in this here snuggery."

Constable Nightingale smiled knowingly, and said, "Cold pork and pickles ain't half a bad supper, to say nothing of sausages, roast fowl, and——" He sniffed intelligently and inquired, "Ain't there a baked taterny smell somewheres near?"

"Now you mention it," replied Constable Wigg, also sniffing, "I believe there is."

"And here they are, Wigg," said Constable Nightingale, open-

ing the door of the oven, and exposing four large floury potatoes baking in their skins. "Not yet quite done, not yet quite ready to bust, but all a-growing and a-blowing, and waiting for butter and pepper. They're relishy enough without butter and pepper, but with butter and pepper they're a feast for a emperor."

"Ah," sighed Constable Wigg, "it's better to be born lucky than rich. Now just cast your eye at the door, Nightingale. I'm blest if that beastly cat ain't poking it's nose in again." And as though there was within him a superabundance of vicious energy which required immediate working off, Constable Wigg threw his truncheon at the cat, which, without uttering a sound, fled from the kitchen. "What riles me about that cat is that it moves about like a ghost, without as much as a whine. It takes you all of a sudden, like a stab in the back. It'll be up to some mischief before the night is out."

"Why, Wigg," said Constable Nightingale with a laugh, "you talk of it as if it wasn't a cat at all."

"I don't believe it is. In my opinion it's a spectre cat, a spirit without a solid body. I lifted it with my foot in the street, and not a sound come from it. I kicked it in the passage, and it crept away like a ghost. I let fly my truncheon at it and hit it on the head, and off it went like a shadder, without a whine. It ain't natural. If it comes across me again I advise it to say its prayers."

Which, to say the least of it, was an absurd recommendation to offer to a cat. But Constable Wigg was in an unreasonable and spiteful temper, and he became morose and melancholy when he saw how thoroughly Constable Nightingale was making himself at home in Mrs. Middlemore's kitchen; or perhaps it was the sight of the tempting food on the table which, without lawful invitation, he dared not touch. However it was, he was not allowed much time for gloomy reflection, his thoughts being diverted by the violent slamming of the street door, and by the further sound of a person breathing heavily in her course down stairs.

"It's Mrs. Middlemore," said Constable Nightingale, in a low tone. "I never thought she'd be able to open the door alone with such a wind blowing. We'll give her a surprise."

They heard Mrs. Middlemore stop outside the kitchen, and exclaim, "Well! To think I should 'ave been so foolish as to leave the candle alight! I could 'ave sworn I blowed it out before I left the room!" Then she opened the door, and it was well that Constable Nightingale darted forward to her support, for if he had not she would have fallen to the ground in affright, and the supper beer would have been lost to taste if not to sight. It was as well, too, that he put his face close enough to her lips to partially stifle a kind of hysterical gurgle which was escaping therefrom. It was, however, a proceeding of which Constable Wigg did not inwardly approve.

"Pluck up, Mrs. Middlemore," said Constable Nightingale

cheerily, "there's nothing wrong. It's only me and my mate, Wigg, who's on night duty here. Everything's as right as a fiddle. Take a pull at the beer—a long pull. Now you feel better, don't you?"

Mrs. Middlemore—her movements being enviously watched by Constable Wigg, whose thirst was growing almost unbearable—removed her lips from the jug, and said:

"Ever so much. But 'ow did you get in?"

"Didn't get in at all," said Constable Nightingale jocosely; "we was blown in."

"Blown in?"

"Yes, my dear. We was standing outside, Wigg and me, leaning against the door, when the wind come like a clap of thunder and blew it clean open, and of course we went with it, flat on our backs the pair of us. When we got on our feet again the wind was tearing so, and the snow was pelting down that fierce, that I thought we might venture to take a liberty, and we come down here to warm ourselves. And that's the long and the short of it, my dear."

He still had his arm round Mrs. Middlemore's waist, and now he gave her a hug. She was a pleasant-faced, round-bodied woman, some forty years of age, and she looked up smilingly as the constable—her favourite constable—hugged her, and said:

"Well, now, I declare you did startle me. When I opened the door and sor two men a-standing in my kitchen, I thought of burglars, and you might 'ave knocked me down with a feather."

"And now we're here," said Constable Nightingale, "I don't suppose you'd have the heart to turn us out."

"Turn you out!" exclaimed Mrs. Middlemore. "I wouldn't turn a cat out on sech a night as this!"

"More cats," thought Constable Wigg, with his eyes on the cold pork and pickles.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A THRILLING INCIDENT.

"THE wonder is," said Constable Nightingale, while Mrs. Middlemore shook the snow out of her clothes, "how you had the courage to venture out in such weather."

"It's 'abit, Mr. Nightingale, that's what it is. Once I gits to doing a thing regular, done it must be if I want to keep my peace of mind. There wouldn't be a wink of sleep for me if I didn't go and fetch my supper beer myself every night. I don't keep a gal, Mr. Winks—"

"Wigg," said that gentleman in correction, with a dreamy look at the beer jug.

"I beg you a thousand pardons, Mr. Wigg, I'm sure. I don't keep a gal, and that's why my place is always nice and clean, as you see it now. If you want your work done, do it yourself—that's my motter. Not that I can't afford to keep a gal, but Mr. Felix he ses when he come to me about the rooms when I didn't 'ave a blessed lodger in the 'ouse, 'I'll take 'em," he ses, 'conditionally. You mustn't let a room in the place to nobody but me.' 'But I make my living out of the rooms, sir,' ses I, 'and I can't afford to let 'em remain empty.' 'You *can* afford,' ses Mr. Felix, 'if I pay for 'em remaining empty. What rent do you arks for the whole 'ouse with the exception of the basement?' I opened my mouth wide, I don't mind telling you that, Mr. Wigg. All he ses is, 'Agreed.' 'Then there's attendance, sir,' I ses. 'How much for that?' he arks. I opens my mouth wide agin, and all he ses is, 'Agreed.' You see, Mr. Wigg, seeing as 'ow you're a friend of Mr. Nightingale's, and as no friend of his'n can be anythink but a gentleman, there's no 'arm in my telling you a thing or two about Mr. Felix, more especially as you're on night duty 'ere."

"Here's to our better acquaintance," said Constable Wigg, laying hands on the beer jug in an absent kind of way, and raising it to his mouth. When, after a long interval, he put it down again with a sigh of intense satisfaction, he met the reproachful gaze of Constable Nightingale, who gasped:

"Well, of all the cheek! Without ever being asked!"

"Love your 'eart," said Mrs. Middlemore, "what does that matter? He's as welcome as the flowers in May, being a friend of your'n." She handed the jug to Constable Nightingale, asking, as she did so, "Did you ever 'ave a inspiration, Mr. Nightingale?"

Constable Nightingale did not immediately reply, his face being buried in the jug. When it was free, and he had wiped his mouth, he said in a mild tone—any harsh judgment he may have harboured against Constable Wigg being softened by the refreshing draught:

"I must have had one to-night when I come this way, out of my beat, to have a talk with Wigg, and to see that you was all right. The taters in the oven 'll be burnt to a cinder if they're not took out immediate."

"You've got a nose for baked taters, you 'ave," said Mrs. Middlemore admiringly. "Trust you for finding out things without eyes. But you always can smell what I've got in the oven."

Constable Wigg rubbed his hands joyously when he saw Mrs. Middlemore lay three plates and draw three chairs up to the table. Then she whipped the baked potatoes out of the oven, saying:

"Done to a turn. Now we can talk and 'ave supper at the same time. Make yourself at 'ome, Mr. Wigg, and 'elp yourself to what you like. I'll 'ave a bit of fowl, Mr. Nightingale, and jest a thin slice of the cold pork, if you please, Mr. Wigg. It's a favourite

dish of your'n, I can see. Mr. Nightingale, *you* won't make compliments, I'm sure. You're the last man as ought to in this 'ouse." Constable Nightingale pressed her foot under the table, and she smiled at him, and continued, "I was going to tell you about my inspiration when I got the supper beer. 'A pint and a 'arf won't be enough,' ses I to myself; a pint and a 'arf's my regular allowance, Mr. Wigg, and I don't find it too much, because I don't drink sperrits. 'A pint and a 'arf won't be enough,' ses I to myself; 'I shouldn't be surprised if a friend dropped in, so I'll double it.' And I did."

"That's something like an inspiration," said Constable Nightingale, looking amorously at Mrs. Middlemore, who smiled amorously at him in return.

Constable Wigg cut these inclinings short by remarking, "We was talking of Mr. Felix. Nightingale commenced twice to-night telling a story about him, and it's not told yet."

"Not my fault, Wigg," Constable Nightingale managed to say with his mouth full.

"I'll tell my story first," said Mrs. Middlemore, "and he can tell 'is afterwards. Try them sausages, Mr. Wigg. Mr. Felix always 'as the best of everythink. I buy 'em at Wall's. So when he ses 'Agreed' to the rent and attendance, he ses, 'And about servants?' 'I can't afford to keep more than one, sir,' I ses. 'You can,' ses he; 'you can afford to keep none. You'll find me the best tenant you ever 'ad, and what you've got to do is to foller my instructions.' 'I'll do my best, sir,' ses I. 'It 'll pay you,' ses he, 'to let me do exactly as I please, and never to cross me.' And I'm bound to say, Mr. Wigg, that it 'as paid me. 'We shall git along capitally together,' ses he, 'without servants. They're a prying, idle lot, and I won't 'ave 'em creeping up the stairs on welwet toes to find out what I'm doing. So keep none, Mrs. Middlemore,' he ses, 'not the ghost of one. You can wait on me without assistance. If I want to entertain a visitor or two I'll 'ave the meals brought in ready cooked, and if we want hextra attendance I'll git Gunter to send in a man as knows 'is business, and can 'old 'is tongue.' Of course I was agreeable to that, and he pays me down a month in advance, like the gentleman he is. Though I don't drink sperrits, Mr. Nightingale, that's no reason why you should deny yourself. You know where the bottle is, and per'aps Mr. Wigg will jine you."

"Mrs. Middlemore," said Constable Wigg, "you're a lady after my own heart, and I'm glad I'm alive. Here's looking towards you."

"Thank you, Mr. Wigg," said Mrs. Middlemore, "and what I say is, it's a shame that men like you and Mr. Nightingale should be trapesing the streets with the snow coming down and the wind a-blowing as it is now. Jest listen to it; it's going on worse than ever. Might I take the liberty of inquiring—you being on the

beat, Mr. Wigg—whether you sor a lady come out of the 'ouse while I was gone for the supper beer?"

"No lady come out of the house," replied Constable Wigg. "A man did."

"A man!" cried Mrs. Middlemore. "Not Mr. Felix, surely?"

"No, not him," said Constable Nightingale. "A slimmish-looking man, with a red handkercher round his neck."

"A slimmish-looking man, with a red 'andkercher round 'is neck?" exclaimed Mrs. Middlemore. "'Ow did he git in?"

"That's not for us to say," said Constable Nightingale. "Perhaps Mr. Felix let him in when you was away."

"Yes, most likely," said Mrs. Middlemore; "of course that must be. Mr. Felix often lets people in 'isself. 'Mrs. Middlemore,' he ses sometimes, 'if there's a ring or a knock at the door, I'll attend to it. You needn't trouble yourself.' And I don't—knowing 'im, and knowing it'll pay me better to foller 'is instructions. For there's never a time that sech a thing 'appens that Mr. Felix don't say to me afterwards, 'Ere's a half-sovering for you, Mrs. Middlemore.'"

"You're in for one to-morrow morning, then," observed Constable Wigg, "because it was a man we saw, and not a woman."

"He won't forgit it," said Mrs. Middlemore, "not 'im. He's free and generous with 'is money, so long as he's let alone, and not pry'd upon. What he does is no business of mine, and I ain't going to make it mine."

"Ah, Mrs. Middlemore," said Constable Wigg, emptying his second glass of whisky, "you know which side your bread is buttered."

"I wasn't born yesterday," said Mrs. Middlemore, with a shrewd smile, "and I've seed things that I keep to myself. Why not? You'd do the same if you was in my shoes, wouldn't you?"

"That we would," replied both the policemen in one breath; and Constable Wigg added, "You're a lucky woman to have such a lodger."

"Well," said Mrs. Middlemore, "I don't deny it. I never met with sech a man as Mr. Felix, and I don't believe there is another. Why, when he took possession, he ses, 'Clear out every bit of furniture there is in the rooms. Send it to auction if you like, and sell it, and pocket the money. When I leave you shall 'ave all my furniture, or I'll furnish the rooms over agin according to your fancy, and it shan't cost you a penny.' I was agreeable to that, you may be sure. Then he begins to furnish, and if you was to see 'is rooms, Mr. Wigg, you'd be that took aback that you wouldn't know what to say. All sorts of wonderful picters, painted plates and dishes, 'angings, old lamps, and goodness only knows what. I don't understand 'arf of 'em. There! I've talked enough about Mr. Felix for once. Let's talk of somethink else."

"Do you keep cats, Mrs. Middlemore?" asked Constable

Nightingale, brewing another grog for himself and Constable Wigg.

"I don't," replied Mrs. Middlemore. "Mr. Felix won't 'ave one in the 'ouse."

"There's one in the house now, though," said Constable Nightingale. "It come in when the wind burst open the street door, and Wigg and me fell into the passage. He says it's not a cat, but a ghost of one."

"Lord save us!" ejaculated Mrs. Middlemore. "If Mr. Felix sees it he'll never forgive me. He 'as a 'atred of 'em. And the ghost of a cat, too!" She was so impressed that she edged closer to Constable Nightingale.

"It was a spectre cat," said Constable Wigg, desirous to do something to divert Mrs. Middlemore's thoughts from Mr. Felix, and also from her leaning towards his comrade. "And then there was that cry for 'Help,' I fancied I heard."

"What cry for 'elp?" asked Mrs. Middlemore.

"I thought I heard it three times," said Constable Wigg—but he was prevented from going further by an incident which was followed by a startling picture. Constable Nightingale, rather thrown off his balance by the drink he had imbibed, and desirous to meet the advances of Mrs. Middlemore, slyly put his arm round her waist, and to hide the movement from the observation of his brother constable, made a clumsy movement and overturned the candle, the effect of which was to put out the light and to leave them in darkness. He was not sorry for it, for the reason that he was hugging Mrs. Middlemore close. But Constable Wigg started up in fear, and cried:

"Somebody has pushed open the door!"

In point of fact, the kitchen door had been quietly pushed open, and the other two observed it when their attention was directed towards it.

"What is it?" whispered Mrs. Middlemore, shaking like a jelly. "Oh, what is it?"

Constable Nightingale, for the second time that night, pulled out his dark lantern, and cast its light upon the door. And there, imbedded in the circle of light, was the cat which had already twice before alarmed Constable Wigg. They uttered a cry of horror, and indeed they were justified by the picture which presented itself. The cat was *red*. Every bristle sticking up on its skin was pointed with blood.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A DISCUSSION ABOUT RED CATS AND WHITE SNOW.

In a fit of terror the constable dropped the lantern, and the cat, unseen by the occupants of the kitchen, scuttled away.

"If you don't light the candle," gasped Mrs. Middlemore, "I shall go off." And she forthwith proceeded to demonstrate by screaming, "O, O, O!"

"She's done it, Wigg," said Constable Nightingale; "she's gone off. Strike a light, there's a good fellow, and pick up the lantern. I can't do it myself; I've got my arms full."

Constable Wigg had now recovered his courage, and inspired by jealousy quickly struck a match and lit the candle. Mrs. Middlemore lay comfortably in the arms of Constable Nightingale, who did not seem anxious to rid himself of his burden. Stirred to emulative sympathy, Constable Wigg took possession of one of Mrs. Middlemore's hands, and pressed and patted it with a soothing, "There, there, there! What has made you come over like this? There's nothing to be frightened of, is there, Nightingale?"

"Nothing at all," replied Constable Nightingale irascibly, for he by no means relished his comrade's insidious attempt to slide into Mrs. Middlemore's affections. "You're better now, ain't you?"

"A little," murmured Mrs. Middlemore, "a very little."

"Take a sip of this," said Constable Wigg, holding a glass to her lips; "it'll bring you round."

Ignoring her previous declaration that she did not "drink sperrits," Mrs. Middlemore sipped the glass of whisky, and continued to sip, with intermittent shudders, till she had drained the last drop. Then she summoned sufficient strength to raise herself languidly from Constable Nightingale's arms, and looked towards the door.

"Where's it gone to?" she asked in a trembling voice. "What's become of the 'orrid creature?"

"What horrid creature, my dear?" inquired Constable Nightingale, winking at his comrade.

"The cat! The red cat!"

"A red cat!" exclaimed Constable Nightingale, in a jocular voice; "who ever heard of such a thing? Who ever saw such a thing?"

"Why, I did—and you did, too."

"Not me," said Constable Nightingale, with another wink at Constable Wigg.

"Nor me," said that officer, following the lead.

"Do you mean to tell me you didn't see a cat, and that the cat you sor wasn't red?"

"I saw a cat, yes," said Constable Nightingale, "but not a red 'un—no, not a red 'un. What do you say, Wigg?"

"I say as you says, Nightingale."

"There's lobsters, now," said Constable Nightingale; "we know what colour they are when they're boiled, but we don't boil cats, that I know of, and if we did they wouldn't turn red. You

learnt natural history when you was at school, Wigg. What did they say about red cats?"

"It's against nature," said Constable Wigg, adding, with an unconscious imitation of Macbeth, "there's no such thing."

"I must take your word for it," said Mrs. Middlemore, only half convinced, "but if ever my eyes deceived me they deceived me jest now. If you two gentlemen wasn't 'ere, I'd be ready to take my oath the cat was red. And now I come to think of it, what made the pair of you cry out as you did?"

"What made us cry out?" repeated Constable Nightingale, who, in this discussion, proved himself much superior to his brother officer in the matter of invention. "It was natural, that's what it was, natural. I'm free to confess I was a bit startled. First, there's the night—listen to it; it's going on worse than ever—ain't that enough to startle one? I've been out in bad nights, but I never remember such a one-er as this. Did you, Wigg?"

"Never. If it goes on much longer it'll beat that American blizzard they talked so much of."

"That's enough to startle a chap," continued Constable Nightingale, "let alone anything else. But then there was that talk about a spectre cat. I ain't frightened of much that I know of. Put a man before me, or a dog, or a horse, and I'm ready to tackle 'em, one down and the other come up, or altogether if they like; but when you come to spectres, I ain't ashamed to say I'm not up to 'em. It's constitootional, Mrs. Middlemore; I was that way when I was little. There was a cupboard at home, and my mother used to say, 'Don't you ever open it, Jimmy; there's a ghost hiding behind the door.' I wouldn't have put my hand on the knob for untold gold. It's the same now. Anything that's alive I don't give way to; but when it comes to ghosts and spectres, I take a back seat, and I don't care who knows it. Then there was that cry for 'Help,' that Wigg was speaking of. Then there was the candle going out"—he gave Mrs. Middlemore a nudge as he referred to this incident—"and the sudden opening of the door there. It was all them things together that made me cry out; and if brother Wigg's got any other explanation to give I shall be glad to hear it."

"No, Nightingale," said the prudent and unimaginative Wigg. "I couldn't improve on you. You've spoke like a man, and I hope our good-looking, good-natured landlady is satisfied."

This complimentary allusion served to dispel Mrs. Middlemore's fears, and in a more contented frame of mind she resumed her seat at the table, the constables following her example.

"May the present moment," said Constable Nightingale, lifting his glass, and looking affectionately at Mrs. Middlemore, "be the worst of our lives; and here's my regards to you."

"And mine, my good creature," said Constable Wigg.

"Gents both," said Mrs. Middlemore, now thoroughly restored, "I looks towards you."

Whereupon they all drank, and settled themselves comfortably in their chairs.

"What was in that cupboard," asked Mrs. Middlemore, "that your mother told you there was a ghost in?"

"I didn't find out till I was a man, and it was as much a ghost as I am. But there's a lady present, and I'd better not go on."

"Yes, you must," said Mrs. Nightingale, positively. "You've made me that curious that I'll never speak another word to you if you don't tell me."

"Rather than that should happen I must let you into the secret, I suppose. But you won't mind me mentioning it?"

"Not a bit, Mr. Nightingale. Speak free."

"Well, if you must know, it was where she kept her spare bustle, and a bit or two of hair, and some other little vanities that she didn't want us young 'uns to pull about. There, the murder's out, and I wouldn't have mentioned the things if you hadn't been so curious; but it's a privilege of your sex, Mrs. Middlemore, one of your amiable weaknesses that we're bound to respect."

Mrs. Middlemore laughed, and asked Constable Wigg what he was thinking of. That worthy had, indeed, put on his considering cap, as the saying is; he felt that Constable Nightingale was making the running too fast, and that he should be left hopelessly in the rear unless he made an attempt to assert himself, and to show that he knew a thing or two.

"I was thinking of the red cat," he said.

"Wigg," said Constable Nightingale in a tone of reproof, "I'm astonished at you. When everything's been made smooth!"

"For the moment, Nightingale, for the moment," said Constable Wigg complacently. "But there's by-and-by to reckon with. It ain't to be expected that Mrs. Middlemore can have us always with her, though I'm sure I should ask for nothing better. What could a man want better than this? Outside snow and blow, inside wine and shine."

"You're quite a poet, Mr. Wigg," said Mrs. Middlemore admiringly.

"I don't see it," grumbled Constable Nightingale; "where's the wine?"

"If this," said Constable Wigg, raising his glass and looking at its contents with the eye of a connoisseur, "ain't as good as the best of wine, I stand corrected. Did you ever hear of a poet's licence, Nightingale?" He asked this question banteringly.

"No, I didn't, and I don't believe you know where to get one, and what the Government charge for it."

"I'm afraid, Nightingale," said Constable Wigg, beginning to feel the effects of the drink, "that you've no soul for poetry."

"Never you mind whether I have or haven't," retorted Constable Nightingale.

"Gents both," interposed Mrs. Middlemore, "whatever you do, don't fall out."

"I bear no malice," said Constable Nightingale, who was really a simple-minded, good-hearted fellow; "shake hands, Wigg, and let bygones be bygones. All I want you to do is to let the red cat alone, or to stick to the point, and have done with it once and for all."

"Very good, Nightingale," said Constable Wigg, assuming the lofty air of a man who had established his claim to pre-eminence. "I'll stick to the point, and if I don't make Mrs. Middlemore's mind easy I'll give up. I'm only thinking of you, I give you my word, ma'am."

"You're very kind, I'm sure," murmured Mrs. Middlemore, inclining with the proverbial fickleness of her sex now to Constable Nightingale and now to Constable Wigg.

"It's the least I can do," proceeded Constable Wigg, addressing himself solely to his hostess, "after the way I've been treated here. Not for the last time, I hope."

"Not by a many," said Mrs. Middlemore, smirking at the flatterer, "if it remains with me."

"You're monarch of all you survey, ma'am," observed the wily Wigg, smirking back at her, "and remain with you it must, as long as you remain single."

"O, Mr. Wigg!"

"It's nobody's fault but your own if you do; there's not many as can pick and choose, but you're one as can. Perhaps you're hard to please, ma'am——"

"I ain't," said Mrs. Middlemore, so energetically that Constable Nightingale began to think it time to interfere.

"You're forgetting the red cat, Wigg," he said.

"Not at all," said Constable Wigg blandly; "I'm coming to it, but I don't forget that Mrs. Middlemore has nerves. It amounts to this, ma'am. I've read a bit in my time, and I'm going to give you—and Nightingale, if he ain't too proud—the benefit of it. You *did* see a red cat, ma'am."

"Did I?" said Mrs. Middlemore, looking around with a shiver.

"You did, ma'am, and yet the cat wasn't red. I thought it was red, and so did Nightingale, if he'll speak the truth. I'll wait for him to say."

"I won't keep you waiting long," said Constable Nightingale in a surly tone. "As you and Mrs. Middlemore seem to be of one mind, I'll make a clean breast of it. I thought it was red, and when I made light of it I did it for her sake."

He said this so tenderly that Mrs. Middlemore rewarded him with a look of gratitude; but she kept her eyes averted from the kitchen door.

"Now we can get on like a house on fire," said Constable Wigg. "When you winked at me, Nightingale, I didn't contradict you, but I fell a-thinking, and then what I've read come to my mind. You've been out in the snow, Mrs. Middlemore, and you saw nothing but white. We've been out in the snow, ma'am, and we saw nothing but white. Not for a minute, not for five, not for ten, but for hours I may say. I remember reading somewhere that when you've looked for a longish time upon nothing but white that it's as likely as not the next thing you see will be red, never mind what the colour really is. That's the way with us. The cat's been haunting me, in a manner of speaking, the whole livelong night, and what with that and the snow, and being all of a sudden shoved into darkness, the minute a light shines on the wretched thing it comes to me as red as a ball of fire; and it comes to you the same, because the snow's got into your eyes and affected your sight."

"Bosh!" exclaimed Constable Nightingale.

"What's that you say, Nightingale?" asked Constable Wigg.

"Bosh! I didn't want to frighten Mrs. Middlemore, and that's the reason I wouldn't harp on it, but now you've raked it up again I'll have the matter settled."

So saying, Constable Nightingale rose from his chair.

"Where are you going?" cried Mrs. Middlemore. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to find that cat," replied Constable Nightingale, "if it's in the house. If it isn't red, I give in and apologize. If it is, I shall take the liberty of saying for the third time, Bosh!"

He walked towards the door, but started back before he reached it, and pointing to the floor, asked:

"What do you call that, Wigg? Is that a deloosion?"

Constable Wigg advanced, looked down, rubbed his eyes, looked down again, and answered:

"I'm bound to say there's no mistaking the colour. Have you got any red ochre in the house, ma'am?"

"Not a bit," gasped Mrs. Middlemore, "as I knows on."

"These," said Constable Nightingale, kneeling and examining the floor, "are marks of the cat's paws, and they're red. Look for yourself, Wigg."

"There's no denying it," said the baffled Wigg.

"You're on duty here, Wigg."

"What do you advise, Nightingale? You've been longer in the force than me."

"It's got to be looked into by somebody. It ain't for me to do it, because I'm out of my beat, and I don't want to be made an example of. Would you oblige me by going to the door and giving the alarm?"

"What for?"

"For me, being at a distance, to hear it. For me, hearing it,

to run to your assistance. Do you twig? My being on your beat must be accounted for. That will account for it."

This ingenious suggestion relieved Constable Wigg's mind as well as his comrade's.

"It's a good idea," he said; "and it'll account, too, for our being in the house, supposing anything should be said about it."

"Exactly. Being here with Mrs. Middlemore's permission. You've got a lot to learn, Wigg, and one of the lessons I'd advise you to take to heart"—here he looked significantly at Mrs. Middlemore—"is not to poach on a pal's preserves."

Constable Wigg may have felt the reproach, but he took no notice of it. "You may as well come to the door with me, Nightingale."

"I've no objections."

"I'll come too," said Mrs. Middlemore nervously. "I wouldn't be left alone for anything you could order me."

The three walked upstairs to the passage, Mrs. Middlemore needing the support of Constable Nightingale's arm round her waist; but the moment the fastenings of the street door were unloosed it flew open as though a battering ram had been applied to it, and the wind and snow swept in upon them with undiminished fury.

"Hanged if it ain't getting worse and worse!" muttered Constable Nightingale, helping the others to shut the door, which was accomplished with difficulty.

"Don't make a noise in the passage," whispered Mrs. Middlemore to Constable Wigg. "Mr. Felix would 'ear it, and he'd never forgive me."

"We'll take it for granted, then, that the alarm is given," said Constable Nightingale, "and we'll go downstairs, and consider what ought to be done."

## CHAPTER V.

### DR. LAMB TELLS THE CONSTABLES AND MRS. MIDDLEMORE WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH MR. FELIX.

ARRIVED in that comfortable apartment they shook off the snow dust which had blown in upon them from the street. Then Constable Nightingale assumed a judicial attitude.

"In case of anything being wrong," he said, "we must all be agreed upon what has took place before it's discovered."

"Before what's discovered?" cried Mrs. Middlemore.

"That we've got to find out."

"It's ten to one there's nothing to find out," said Constable Wigg.

"It's ten to one there is," retorted Constable Nightingale. "I go a bit deeper than you, Wigg; but whether there is or there

ain't, it's always well to be prepared with a story. I've got something in my mind that you don't seem to have in yours; what it is you shall hear presently. Mrs. Middlemore, going out for her supper beer at her usual hour, about half-past eleven, shuts the street door behind her, and doesn't return till past twelve. Is that correct, ma'am?"

"Quite correct, Mr. Nightingale; but what are you driving at?"

"All in good time, my dear. You leave the house safe, and you are sure you shut the street door tight?"

"I'll take my oath of it."

"It may come to that; I don't want to scare you, but it may come to that. When you come back with the supper beer you find the street door open?"

"But I don't."

"Excuse me, you do; it's necessary."

"Oh!"

"And I'll tell you why. When you come home you find Wigg and me here, don't you?"

"Yes."

"You've heard how we got in, but it's a fact that we had no business here unless we was called in. We must have been called in by somebody, and whoever it was must have had a reason for inviting us. Is that sound, Wigg?"

"As sound as a rock, Nightingale."

"Mr. Felix didn't call us in, and there's no one else in the house while you've gone for your supper beer?" Mrs. Middlemore coughed, which caused Constable Nightingale to ask, "What's that for?"

"It ain't for me to say," replied Mrs. Middlemore. "What you want to git at is that there's only two people living regularly in the 'ouse, Mr. Felix and me. If Mr. Felix makes it worth my while to keep my own counsel, I'm going to keep it, and I don't care what 'appens."

"I wouldn't persuade you otherwise. Gentlemen that's so liberal with their money as him ain't to be met with every day. Very well, then. There's only you and Mr. Felix living in the house, and he don't call us in. It's you that does that. Why? You shut the street door tight when you went out; you find it open when you come back, and at the same time you see a man with a red handkerchief round his neck run out of the house. Of course you're alarmed; Wigg happens to be near, and you call him; he, thinking he may want assistance, calls me; and that's how it is we're both here at the present moment. That's pretty straight, isn't it?"

Both his hearers agreed that it was, and he proceeded:

"But we mustn't forget that we've been here some time already. I make it, by my silver watch that I won in a raffle, twenty

minutes to two. Your kitchen clock, Mrs. Middlemore, is a little slow."

"Do what I will," said Mrs. Middlemore, "I can't make it go right."

"Some clocks," observed Constable Nightingale, with a touch of humour—he was on the best of terms with himself, having, in a certain sense, snuffed out Constable Wigg—"are like some men and women; they're either too slow or too fast, and try your hardest you can't alter 'em. We must be able to account for the time between past twelve o'clock and now; there's no need to be too particular; such a night as this is 'll excuse a lot. I'll take the liberty of stopping your clock, and putting the hands back to twelve, so that you won't be fixed to a half hour or so. The clock stopped while you was getting your supper beer, of course. Likewise, I stop my watch, and put the hands back to about the same time. Now, what do I do when Wigg calls me here? I hear what you, ma'am, have to say about the street door being open and a man running out and almost upsetting you, and I make tracks after him. I don't catch him, and then I come back here, and that brings us up to this very minute. Plain sailing, so far. You'll bear it in mind, you and Wigg, won't you?"

"I've got it," said Wigg, "at my fingers' ends."

"So 'ave I," said Mrs. Middlemore.

"But what are you going to do now?" asked Constable Wigg.

"To find the cat," replied Constable Nightingale.

"Going to take it up?" This with a fine touch of sarcasm.

"No, Wigg," said Constable Nightingale, speaking very seriously. "I want to make sure where it got that red colour from, because, if you want to know, it's blood."

Mrs. Middlemore uttered a stifled scream and held up her hands.

"That," continued Constable Nightingale, in a tone of severity to his brother constable, "is what I had in my mind and you didn't have in yours. Why, if you look with only half an eye at them stains on the floor you can't mistake 'em."

"O dear, O dear," moaned Mrs. Middlemore, "we shall all be murdered in our beds!"

"Nothing of the sort, my dear," said Constable Nightingale; "we'll look after you. Pull yourself together, there's a good soul, and answer me one or two questions. I know that Mr. Felix comes home late sometimes."

"Very often, very often."

"And that, as well as being generous with his money, he likes his pleasures. Now, are you sure he was at home when you went out for your beer?"

"I'm certain of it."

"And that he didn't go out before you come back?"

"'Ow can I tell you that?"

"Of course. A stupid question. But at all events he ain't the sort of man to go out in such a storm as this?"

"Not 'im. He's too fond of 'is comforts."

"Does he ever ring for you in the middle of the night—at such a time as this, for instance?"

"Never."

"Has he ever been took ill in the night, and rung you up?"

"Never."

"Do you ever go up to his room without being summoned?"

"It's more than I dare. 'Never,' he ses to me, 'under any circumstances whatever, let me see you going upstairs to my rooms unless I calls you. Never let me ketch you prying about. If I do you shall 'ear of it in a way you won't like.'"

Constable Nightingale was silent a few moments, and then he said briskly, "Let's go and hunt up that cat."

But although they searched the basement through they could not find it.

"Perhaps," suggested Constable Wigg, "it got out of the house when we opened the street door just now."

"Perhaps," assented Constable Nightingale laconically.

Then they ascended the stairs to the ground floor, Constable Nightingale examining very carefully the marks of the cat's paws on the oilcloth.

"Do you see, Mrs. Middlemore? Blood. There's no mistaking it. And I'm hanged if it doesn't go upstairs to the first floor."

"You're not going up, Mr. Nightingale?" asked Mrs. Middlemore under her breath, laying her hand on his arm.

"If I know myself," said Constable Nightingale, patting her hand, "I am. Whatever happens, it's my duty, and Wigg's, to get at the bottom of this. What else did you call us in for?"

"To be sure," said Mrs. Middlemore helplessly; "but if you've any feeling for me, speak low."

"I will, my dear. My feelings for you well you must know, but this is not the time. Look here at this stain, and this, and this. The spectre cat has been up these stairs. Puss, puss, puss, puss! Not likely that it'll answer; it's got the cunning of a fox. That's Mr. Felix's room if my eyes don't deceive me."

"Yes, it is."

"But it don't look the same door as the one I've been through; it ain't the first time I've been here, you know. Where's the key-hole? I'll take my oath there was a keyhole when I last saw the door."

"The key'ole's 'id. That brass plate covers it; it's a patent spring, and he fixes it some'ow from the inside; he presses something, and it slides down; then he turns a screw, and makes it tight."

"Can any one do it but him?"

"I don't think they can; it's 'is own idea, he ses."

"See how we're getting on, Wigg. No one can work that brass plate but him; that shows he's at home." He knocked at the door, and called "Mr. Felix, Mr. Felix!"

"He'll give me notice to leave," said Mrs. Middlemore, "I'm sure he will. He's the last man in the world to be broke in upon like this."

"Leave it to me, my dear," said Constable Nightingale. "I'll make it all right with him. What did he say to me when I was on this beat? I told you, you remember, Wigg. 'Constable,' says he, 'you're on night duty here.' 'Yes, sir,' I answers. 'Very good,' says he, 'I live in this house, and I always make it a point to look after them as looks after me.' That was a straight tip, and I'm looking after him now. Mr. Felix, Mr. Felix!"

But though he called again and again, and rapped at the door twenty times, he received no answer from within the room.

"It's singular," he said, knitting his brows. "He must be a sound sleeper, must Mr. Felix. I'll try again."

He continued to knock and call, "loud enough," as he declared, "to rouse the dead," but no response came to the anxious little group on the landing.

"There's not only no keyhole," said Constable Nightingale, "but there's no handle to take hold of. The door's like a safe without a knob. Mr. Felix, Mr. Felix, Mr. Felix! Don't you hear us, sir? I've got something particular to say to you."

For all the effect he produced he might have spoken to a stone wall, and he and Constable Wigg and Mrs. Middlemore stood looking helplessly at each other.

"I tell you what it is," he said, tightening his belt, "this has got beyond a joke. What with the silence, and the blood stains, and the man with the red handkerchief round his neck as run out of the house while Wigg and me was talking together outside, there's more in this than meets the eye. Now, Mrs. Middlemore, there's no occasion for us to speak low any more; it's wearing to the throat. Have you got any doubt at all that the brass plate there couldn't be fixed as it is unless somebody was inside the room?"

"I'm certain of it, Mr. Nightingale; I'm certain of it."

"Then Mr. Felix, or somebody else, must be there, and if he's alive couldn't help hearing us, unless he's took a sleeping draught of twenty-horse power. There's a bell wire up there; Wigg, give me a back."

Constable Wigg stooped, and Constable Nightingale stood on his back and reached the wire, which he pulled smartly for so long a time that Constable Wigg's back gave way, and brought Constable Nightingale to the ground somewhat unexpectedly. Certainly every person in the house possessed of the sense of hearing must have heard the bell, which had a peculiar resonant ring, and seemed on this occasion to have a hundred ghostly echoes which

proclaimed themselves incontinently from attic to basement. No well behaved echo would have displayed such a lack of method.

"Oughtn't that to rouse him?" asked Constable Nightingale.

"It ought to," replied Mrs. Middlemore, "if——" and paused, the "if" frozen on her tongue.

"Ah," said Constable Nightingale gravely, "if!"

There was a window on the landing, and he opened it. The snow dust floated through it, but in less quantities, and there was a perceptible abatement in the violence of the storm. He closed the window.

"It ain't so bad as it was. Mrs. Middlemore, do you think I could force this door open?"

"Not without tools. It's made of oak."

"No harm in trying. Here, Wigg, give us a pound."

They applied their shoulders with a will, but their united efforts produced no impression.

"It's got to be opened," said Constable Nightingale, "by fair means or foul. Wigg, do you know of a locksmith about here?"

"I don't."

In point of fact Constable Nightingale knew of one, but it was at some little distance, and he did not want to leave Constable Wigg and Mrs. Middlemore alone.

"There's one in Wardour Street," he said.

"Is there?" said Constable Wigg. "I'm new to the neighbourhood, and I'm certain I shouldn't be able to find it."

"All right," said Constable Nightingale briskly, seeing his way out of the difficulty, "we'll go together."

"And leave me alone 'ere after what's 'appened!" cried Mrs. Middlemore. "Not if you was to fill my lap with dymens! That 'orrid cat 'd come and scare the life out of me!"

"We can't all go," mused Constable Nightingale, with a stern eye on his comrade, "and I ain't a man to shirk a duty; but don't go back on a pal, Wigg, whatever you do."

"Nobody could ever bring that against me, Nightingale," said Constable Wigg, in an injured tone; "and I don't know what you're driving at."

"I hope you don't," said Constable Nightingale, by no means softened, "that's all I've got to say. I hope you don't. You'd better both see me to the door, and shut it after me. And mind you keep your ears open to let me in when I come back."

Constable Nightingale, a victim to duty, was presently battling with the storm through the deserted streets, while Constable Wigg and Mrs. Middlemore, at the housekeeper's suggestion, made their way to the warm kitchen, where she brewed for her companion a stiff glass of grog.

"What did Mr. Nightingale mean," asked Mrs. Middlemore, "when he said never go back on a pal?"

"I'd rather not say," replied Constable Wigg, and then appeared

suddenly to come to a different conclusion. "But why not? The last of my wishes would be to vex you, and when you're curious you like to know, don't you, my—I beg you a thousand pardons—don't you, ma'am?"

"Mr. Wigg," observed Mrs. Middlemore, "I'm a woman, and I do like to know. Oh!" she cried, with a little shriek, "was that somebody moving upstairs?"

"No, my dear, no. Keep close to me; I will protect you, and proud of the chance, as who wouldn't be? When Nightingale threw out that hint, he meant, if I'm not mistook, that a lady should have only one admirer, himself."

"Well, I'm sure!"

"He's not a bad sort of fellow is Nightingale—it ain't for me to say anything against him—but when he wants a monopoly of something very precious"—and Constable Wigg looked languishingly at Mrs. Middlemore—"when he wants that, and as good as says it belongs to him and no one else, he touches a tender chord. There's no harm in my admiring you, my dear; who could help it, that's what I'd like to know? Thank you—I *will* take another lump of sugar. Yes, who could help it? Charms like yours—if you'll forgive me for mentioning 'em—ain't to be met with every day, and a man with a heart would have to be blind not to be struck. There! I wouldn't have spoke so free if it hadn't been for Nightingale and for your asking me what he meant. But a man can't always restrain his feelings, and I hope I haven't hurt yours, my dear."

"Not a bit, Mr. Wigg," said Mrs. Middlemore, and her tone would have been amorous had it not been for the mysterious trouble in her house; "you've spoke beautiful."

"Don't tell him I said anything, my dear."

"I won't. I give you my 'and on it."

He took it and squeezed it, and said, "What's passed we'll keep to ourselves."

"We will, Mr. Wigg."

"Here's to our better acquaintance, my dear."

"I'm sure you're kindness itself. Oh, Mr. Wigg, I 'ope nothing has 'appened to Mr. Felix."

"I hope so, too. My opinion is that he's out, and that the brass plate over the keyhole has got there by accident. But Nightingale always makes the worst of things. That's not my way. Wait till the worst comes, I say; it's time enough. You may worrit yourself to death, and be no better off for it after all."

In this strain they continued their conversation, Mrs. Middlemore declaring that it was quite a comfort to have Constable Wigg with her. She confided to him that she had a bit of money saved, and that Mr. Felix had said more than once that he would remember her in his will, which elicited from Constable Wigg the remark that he hoped Mr. Felix had made his will and had behaved

as he ought to; "though, mind you," he added, "I don't believe anything's the matter with him, or that he's at home. It's all through that spectre cat, and as for blood stains, they've got to be proved." A knocking and rattling at the street door caused Mrs. Middlemore to cling very closely to him, and when she recovered her fright, they both went upstairs to let Constable Nightingale in.

"Is that you, Nightingale?" Constable Wigg called out before he turned the key.

"Yes, it's me," cried Constable Nightingale without; "don't keep us waiting all night."

"He's got the locksmith with him," whispered Constable Wigg, with his lips very close to Mrs. Middlemore's ear. Then he threw open the street door.

Constable Nightingale had somebody else with him besides the locksmith. Accompanying them was a tall, thin, gentlemanly-looking, but rather seedy young gentleman, who stepped quickly into the passage.

"Has anything took place?" inquired Constable Nightingale, glancing suspiciously from Constable Wigg to Mrs. Middlemore.

"Nothing," replied Constable Wigg. "There ain't been a sound in the house."

"Just as we turned the corner," said Constable Nightingale, with a motion of his hand towards the seedy young gentleman, "we met Dr. Lamb, who was coming home from a case, and as there's no knowing what might be wanted, I asked him to favour us with his company."

Mrs. Middlemore knew Dr. Lamb, who kept a chemist's shop in the neighbourhood, and she gave him a friendly nod. It must have been a trying case that the young gentleman had come from, for he looked particularly shaky, and was rather unsteady on his legs. The locksmith had brought his tools with him, and he now made some sensible remarks, to the effect that he had been awakened from a sound sleep, and would like to get back to bed again; therefore, had they not better get to work at once? His suggestion was acted upon, and they all proceeded upstairs.

"I'll give him another chance," said Constable Nightingale, and he forthwith exerted the full strength of his lungs and hammered away at the door, to as little purpose as he had previously done. "There's nothing for it," he said, very red in the face, "but to force open the door in the name of the law."

The locksmith, who had brought a basket of tools with him, declared he would make short work of it, but to remove the brass plate and pick the lock occupied him much longer than he expected. However, in the course of about twenty minutes the task was accomplished, and the door stood open for them to enter. Constable Nightingale stepped in first, and the others followed. They were treading close on his heels when he waved them back,

and pointed downwards. There, on the floor, was a little pool of blood. They shuddered as they gazed upon it.

"I thought as much," said Constable Nightingale, the first to speak. "There's been foul play here. The cry for help you heard, Wigg, came from this room.

"But there's nobody here," said Constable Wigg.

"That's 'is bedroom," said Mrs. Middlemore in an awe-struck voice, pointing to a room, the door of which was ajar.

They stepped softly towards it, Dr. Lamb now taking the lead. In an armchair by the side of the bed sat a man, his arms hanging listlessly down. Dr. Lamb shook him roughly.

"Wake up!"

But the figure did not move. Dr. Lamb leant over the recumbent form, and thrust his hand inside the man's waistcoat. Then, with his fingers under the man's chin, he raised the head, so that the face was visible.

"Good Lord!" cried Mrs. Middlemore. "It's Mr. Felix! What's the matter with 'im?"

Dr. Lamb put his finger to his lips, and did not immediately reply. When he removed his hand the head dropped down again, hiding the face.

"If you want to know what's the matter with the man," he said presently, "he's dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed Mrs. Middlemore.

"As a doornail," said Dr. Lamb.

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*(To be continued.)*

## ON THE BOSPHORUS.

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### LETTER II.

MOSQUES, minarets, a mass of grey irregular buildings, ships at anchor—this is what I remember of my first glimpse of Constantinople. Half-an-hour later the sun was beginning his evening illumination, and the fronts of the houses, which rise one above the other in uneven lines, blazed as the sunlight struck on their windows, and as we passed slowly along, our interrupted view became more and more brilliant at every aperture in the gigantic but partially ruined fortresses.

Still I confess I have been disappointed, and I shall always regret that I did not first see the "Golden Horn" from the Bosphorus, as it ought only to be seen. The wonder and delight I had confidently expected to feel, refused to be excited, and I mentally reproached enthusiastic travellers for their fulsome praise of this "Queen of Waters" and her "Golden Straits."

While we were driving to the hotel, the unhealthy atmosphere of the town and the miscellaneous crowd which fills the close and uncleanly streets of Pera, struck me unpleasantly, and my depression culminated when, tired and dusty, we stopped before a dingy mansion with neither garden nor balcony, and I was asked in cheerful tones how I liked Constantinople. The Hotel Royal, where we stayed, is, I believe, considered the best, and the rooms were clean and comfortable, but the food was nothing to boast of. You must not be afraid, however, that I am going to describe our night's accommodation, our dinner, worries about luggage, &c., &c. I shall leave all that until I write a serious book of travels, when I believe these personal details are indispensable—in dearth of more interesting matter.

The following morning my spirits rose slightly; a bough of westeria came nodding in at my open window, and a white rose was struggling up the wall just within reach of my hand. The back windows of the hotel looked upon the garden of the English Embassy, and, besides the view of trees which grow close up to the windows, we had a glimpse of sea and harbour beyond.

I stood enjoying the sights and sounds of spring when I became suddenly aware that I was extremely cold, a shivering penetrating cold, and I was not reassured on being told that a chill at Constantinople was extremely dangerous and frequently meant the prelude to typhoid fever. Vilifying the climate I instantly

abandoned my post by the window and wished myself back at Sofia, where at least the fresh morning air brings no chills, and it is possible to breakfast on the balcony with impunity. Arrayed in a seal-skin coat, which might have been a dust-cloak for all the warmth it gave me, I repaired to the sitting-room for coffee, and was moodily swallowing a series of cupfuls in the hope of getting warm when a visitor was announced, and I had to summon a smile to my face as I answered his greeting:

"Well, and what is your first impression of Constantinople?"

He had come most kindly with the proposal of showing us over the famous bazaar, and I assented eagerly, having heard and read so much of it and thinking that now at last the glories of the East were to be revealed to me.

Alas and alas for De Amici's exquisite description! That most graceful writer certainly throws over his narrative a glamour, which to me at least was certainly not on the actualities he describes. Yes, with sorrow and shame I confess that again I was much disappointed. I do not remember the great entrance gate he speaks of. Only I know that when the way became narrowest and dirtiest we were told that we had reached the bazaar. The steep, narrow streets cross and interlace each other, and the crowd of Jews, Turks and European sight-seers press not without difficulty over the mud-bespattered paving stones. There is a din of voices; buyers and sellers trying to out-bargain each other, and the barking of the lean and mangy street dog adds to the general impression of disorder and confusion.

Still the scene is picturesque; here a Turkish woman with garments of various hues lifted high out of the dirt, and face veiled, all but the dark, gleaming eyes; there an old Jew beside the open stall where his goods lie displayed in a pell-mell heap, watching the sight-seers narrowly and loudly advertising his wares—the embroidered stuffs, the silver bric-à-brac, the inlaid pipes, the armour, the amber rosaries and the *atar* of roses in cut glass pear-shaped bottles: a thousand heaped up oddities and curiosities together from which exhales a faint luxurious perfume.

The centre of the bazaar is roofed in and forms a thousand little passages where it would be equally easy and unpleasant to lose one's way. Here are, I believe, things of real value—even very fine jewels are to be found by those who know how to unearth them; but we saw nothing particularly attractive, and, indeed, the skilful arrangement of the stalls, the rich disorder of silks and carpets and the confusion of bric-à-brac generally prove deceptive when the articles are examined in detail. The only thing we bought—and indeed the only thing that tempted me—was an old silver jewel box, stolen or sold from a dismantled harem; the design, a bunch of grapes, is beautifully beaten out, and though the silver shows signs of wear, the fragile lock and key still preserve, if not jewels, "marine glasses" from thieving fingers.

I returned tired, and while my husband continued his work of sight-seeing, I decided on spending a quiet afternoon at the hotel, in an arm-chair, with a book, not "Murray" or even "De Amici," but with a novel, an English domestic novel, as unlike my surroundings as anything could well be, and calculated to soothe my fagged and weary spirit.

Happily for me this programme was not carried out. We were invited to go in a luxuriously fitted steam-launch to Scutari, or rather to a village below Scutari, first to hear the "howling der-vishes," and afterwards to visit the English Cemetery.

The sense of disappointment which had pervaded me since my arrival vanished when we started, and then for the first time I really felt the wonder and enthusiasm that until now I had waited for in vain.

Unfortunately it is easier to depreciate than to appreciate, and I find it difficult suddenly to leave my minor key and to break into notes of praise. Take up now your *De Amici*: his language vibrating with poetry is but the fitting and perfect accompaniment of his infinitely poetical theme. From description he graduates to the feelings awakened by what he describes, and to the kind of mental exhaustion which succeeds the first delight.

Indeed there is too much to see, too much to wonder at; the objects are too multifarious, the colouring is too brilliant; the historical associations which crowd on the mind jar with the radiant and peaceful glory of the scene. It is impossible to realize that here war has reigned with all its terrors, that the water has been dyed with blood, the sky hidden by smoke, and the air filled with the din of battle.

As we glided past the huge men-of-war, among the swiftly-moving, noiseless caiques, I turned in my seat to look back at the city from whose shadow we were slowly passing: the mass of grey and time-worn buildings rising upon the terraced and uneven ground in irregular lines, their myriads of glass window-panes holding and reflecting back the strong rays of the sun till it seemed as though each house was lit from within; the white marble of mosque or palace here and there shining cold and bright, and the spiral minarets of St. Sophia darting upwards like the jewelled points of a crown.

The water beneath us, the sky above us, was of that blue which is only to be seen in the East, deep, but intensely bright, like the blue of a cut sapphire when the sun strikes it; and coming from the dingy atmosphere of Pera and Stamboul this exuberance of light and colour brought a sense of exultation that I have never before experienced.

From the crowded harbour we swept down the straits, and on each side of us stretched wooded shores and luxuriant gardens, scenting the air with the breath of budding flowers and rich moist earth. A few weeks earlier and we should have seen the

lilac bushes in full blossom; now, their glory over, they trailed their green boughs in the water and clustered in dark clumps, while wild roses clambered about them. In the gardens it was still too early for the mass of roses, only numberless buds gave promise of the future.

I have an incapacity for enjoying anything that is on too large a scale, presents too much to be wondered at, and excites and fatigues the imagination. I long to be able to carry a solitary scene in my mind, to possess it in completion, and therefore, after wandering over a thousand objects, my eye rested satisfied on one—the palace of the late Sultan Mourad. Dazzling like snow in the broad noon-day light, it stands between sky and sea on a carpet of flowers, its

“ Magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in fairy lands forlorn.”

The great poet's fancy came to my mind as an accurate description; there is something so forlorn, so fairy-like and magic about the scene. How lonely the palace stands, how still everything is around it. A prison is it—or a home? What a terrible prison and what a beautiful home! I longed to people it, to break the enchantment that hung about it. Here on the wide marble terrace should Aphrodite linger with her train, while her shell boat tosses yonder in the breeze; or Nausicaa spread her shining garments for the sun to dry, while her maidens wind her skeins of coloured silk; or lovers and ladies of any time or clime break the spell with their laughter and their joy. Young feet should dance on the cold floor, and women rest on the white seats, and music should float on the water, and the sun set to the sounds of singing and of mirth.

A curve in the shore hid the object of my dreaming long before I ceased to weave fancies about it. My mysterious fairy palace, farewell! The unknown life within your walls continues its daily round, and we see nothing but the beautiful exterior, that conceals, perhaps, much of suffering and of fear.

Everything here has an underlying sadness; there is much beauty and little joy: a vague sense of moral blight, of decay and disillusion; and yet nature is so triumphant and so calm, awakening but “quiet thoughts and an immense desire of peace.”

I started from dreams in which Giaours, Undines and Greek emperors all played a confused part, to find that we had reached the village below Scutari, and were anchoring at a small pier.

I landed with my husband and one other gentleman; the launch carrying our hostess went on to Scutari.

We climbed up a steep hill through the village to a wood of cypress trees, where we sat down and waited until we should be admitted to a square wooden building where the howlers were going through some solemn and secret preliminaries, not to be witnessed

by the irreverent stranger. We had long to wait, but in such surroundings we did not grudge the time. The road where we sat was the high road to Teheran, a six weeks' drive from where we landed. Below us were the red roofs of the village, intersected with trees and mounds of grass; the dome of a small mosque, and a ruined archway, which framed in a view of the sea; around us the black, sad cypress. We should have come to see a sea-nymph bathing, or naiads dancing, or Apollo playing to the stones, instead of a fanatical and grotesque ceremony.

While we waited, a green-turbaned saint—the saint is one who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and his green turban is the outward sign and symbol of his inward grace—came down the hill with slow, solemn steps, and features set in an expression of profound but proud melancholy. He was evidently conscious and satisfied that all eyes were bent on him, and indeed during the whole subsequent proceedings we doubted whether the performers would have been so vigorous without the presence of a gallery of Europeans.

We were by no means the only sight-seers. A French lady and her husband, an old English couple, an English lady with her daughter, both deeply interested and enthusiastic, half-a-dozen Englishmen, these formed the little circle among whom we waited, while many others, who had arrived earlier, were grouped in different directions.

At last the Embassy cavass, who had been kindly sent as our guide, and had been making various raids upon the chapel to try and gain admittance, returned with the announcement that the secret ceremonies were over, and that we might enter.

We were ushered into a square wooden building and stood behind a barrier, like sheep in a pen, the space where the howlers sit or stand being railed off. Afterwards, by the advice of the cavass, we went up to the gallery, a rickety and fragile erection, which looked decidedly unsafe; however, the air was fresher and we had an open window behind us.

The active dancers and howlers, those upon whom the responsibility of howling and dancing chiefly rests, number only eleven. The "saints" and the older men, those, I suppose, whose lungs and limbs have passed through the noviceship, sit on mats in rows of three or four deep; a group of "saints" with rosaries in their hands also form a circle in the centre of the square.

The eleven stand in a line, facing a small alcove, hung with weapons, where, later in the proceedings, the high priest first blesses and then walks on the bodies of prostrate children; they go through the most singular contortions, uttering low screams, which gradually grow louder and more harsh; they bend the body forward till the head nearly touches the ground, then backwards with a sort of convulsive shake; they never pause, and the forward and backward movement is so rapid as to be almost indis-

tinguishable. When the heat becomes extreme—the perspiration was pouring off them like water—they drop their outer garments, shake them off rather, and an assistant stands ready to carry them away. Meanwhile the green-turbaned saints sit on the floor and join in the howling, swaying themselves backwards and forwards. On the faces of some of the middle-aged men—not all of them saints—I thought I detected a smile of amusement and incredulity, while on others there was undoubtedly the stamp of sour fanaticism.

A pleasant feature in the ceremony is the liberty allowed the children, who run about among the groups or stand solemnly bowing and endeavouring to get their small forms into the postures assumed by the howlers; they evidently enjoy the thing thoroughly, and outside we found a number of sturdy urchins imitating the sacred howls with great satisfaction to themselves.

After about half-an-hour the programme is varied. The mats upon which the saints sit are taken away; the active eleven join the old men in forming a large circle, and they begin to move round slowly; at first a group of saints and children stand in the midst, but one by one the former join the ring, and the high priest only is left standing with the children. Having howled and danced in a circular form for some time they break up, the high priest stations himself in the alcove, and the children are taken to be blessed. One little thing cried and was carried out, but the others ran up and evidently liked the distinction.

After being blessed they lie prostrate four or five at a time, and the priest, supporting himself by the hand of an assistant, treads lightly upon them, apparently causing them no inconvenience.

The children spring up and run away smiling—so this part of the ceremony, terrific though it sounds, is in reality harmless.

A general howling and waving of arms I believe to be the final act; but so soon as the ceremony with the children was over, we went away, oppressed by the heat and din, together with most of the by-standers.

We did not see the dancing dervishes as we considered one specimen of the kind of performance enough, but yesterday I was shown a description of them, written in 1799 or 1801, by Mr. Whitman, surgeon of the British Royal Marines, in his book on "*Asiatic Turkey*," which shows that these grotesque ceremonies have undergone little change during the last century. As the book is probably out of print, I shall make an extract, which you may like to see after the above account of the howling dervishes:

"On the 20th I was present at a religious ceremony of the dervishes, or Turkish priests; the house in which they assembled was of an octagon form, with two galleries, the upper of which, supported by pillars, was occupied by musicians, who played very soft and solemn music. In the lower gallery were stationed the Turks and others who attended to witness this very singular

service. Round the apartment were hung in frames several Arabic sentences, one of which in particular was suspended exactly over the head of the superior of the dervishes. He was seated, and each of the dervishes, on entering, bowed to him and took his place in the lower gallery.

"Between twenty and thirty of these monks being assembled, the superior repeated a prayer, during the continuance of which they kneeled and bowed their heads to the floor, which they occasionally appeared to kiss. After they had chanted for some time with the accompaniment of the music in the gallery, the superior rose and with a slow and solemn pace walked three times round the apartment, bowing when he passed the Arabic inscription, beneath which he had been seated. The other dervishes now rose, and having repeated this ceremony after him, the superior again seated himself.

"The strangest part of the service was yet to come. The fanatical dervishes next threw off their mantles, and suddenly letting drop a kind of cloth or woollen petticoat, began successively to spin round, each of them taking a station on which he continued to whirl, as if on an axis, during the space of twenty minutes, without coming in contact with those nearest to him. In this exercise, in the course of which they turned round with great celerity, to augment the giddiness which was to produce a holy intoxication, they had at first their arms crossed, with their hands placed on their shoulders. As the velocity of their motion increased they held them up; and finally extended them in a horizontal position, but still without encountering those who were within their reach. This ceremony, which was thrice performed, was constantly accompanied by the soft music from the gallery; and throughout the whole of it great order and solemnity prevailed.

"The dervishes in general are regarded as prophets by the deluded multitude."

This was written ninety years ago, and I believe that in Constantinople at least the influence of these sects has greatly lessened and their number of followers diminished; but the outward form is still scrupulously observed by a devoted few. The Persian rite certainly indicates considerable fanaticism, but in this revolting ceremony, which commemorates the murder of the two sons of the Kalif Ali, the Turks take no part. It is celebrated once a year, in November, and consequently we had not an opportunity of seeing it.

We left the intensely close atmosphere of the howlers' chapel with relief, and at the top of the hill we found the cavass waiting for us with a carriage. I felt that what we had just seen did not well prepare us for visiting the English cemetery, where, according to the plan of the afternoon, we were now to go, but our drive dissipated the unpleasant impression we had received.

Turning off the high road into the cypress wood, we drove slowly

over the brown, unlevel earth; the air was fresh and still, the light more mellow, the black shadow of the sad trees lay across our path. Our conversation was serious; my companions recalled reminiscences of other days, spoke of men who had made their name, done their work and passed away; and they spoke of one whom we had last known in the flush of manhood, in the full tide of talent and ambition—cut off with his career unfinished and the promise of his life unfulfilled. I was a child when I last saw him, and then I little dreamed that in a few short years I should visit his lonely grave in the East.

Without leaving the wood we skirted the high wall to the back of the cemetery, and stopped before a large wooden door which, after some delay, was opened by the guardian, to whom we handed our order of admission. Coming from the semi-obscurity of the wood, the scene before us was dazzling.

At our feet spread a superb garden, with a wealth of flowers, sweeter of breath and brighter of colour than any I have seen in Europe; Eastern heat and light giving richer perfume and warmer tint. The smooth gravel paths wound in among the thick velvet-like grass, and the white tombstones crowned each grave, each bed of flowers. In the midst stands the monument "erected by Queen Victoria and her people" in loving memory of our soldiers who died in the Crimea.

So far as eye could reach spread the laughing, sparkling sea; the western sky was beginning to glow, and streaks of red and gold reflected themselves on the bosom of the water; the air was still as it is towards evening, and the silence was not broken by the sound of voices. Silently we walked among the gravel paths, and leaning over the railing, looked down into the blue depths beneath us; silently we read the inscription telling how a soldier died, and noted how lovingly the rose and eglantine crowned his tombstone and crept above his grave.

The reminder of death in the midst of scenes so glorious and so seductive filled me with an inexpressible melancholy—I thought of the friends of those who lay here, of the mourners who came to mourn in such a ghastly spot, and I felt that the contrast would be to me intolerable. Better some lowly churchyard with its clump of familiar trees and its quiet view of undulating down and spreading beech-wood; here everything called to life and life's enjoyment, and the exuberance of nature's gladness produced an inward revolt against the inevitable end.

"Hush," you will say, "hush."

Yes, yes, I know the peace of faith will silence such rebellion, but without the contest there would be no triumph. Say no more and let my humour have its way. As we sailed back among the wondrous changes of the evening, on my spirit too calm came down.

The sun was setting as we began our sail homewards, the quiet

splendour of the moonlight had transformed the golden city when we reached her quay. From the glories of the sunset we passed almost suddenly into darkness, at least so it seemed to me, accustomed to the long twilight of Northern skies. Day and night came together with a shock, and sea and sky reflected their changing and clashing colours for a brief space; a bird sang out from the lilac bushes on the shore, a dolphin lifted its head to bid good-bye to the parting day, played dark and graceful in the water, and was gone; the outline of the shore grew confused, the shadows lengthened—an instant more and we glided on in the solemn darkness.

But not for long; soon from behind a cloud the moon sent forth pale, uncertain beams, and before we reached the harbour, her fleecy veil was torn away, she poured her silver light full upon us; and in the glory of this resplendent whiteness we saw the city rise mysterious and grand. I think it was so that I liked best to see Constantinople.

M. M.

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## IN THE VALLEY OF DEATH.

By FRANK MARRYAT.

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THE burning rays of the African sun were irradiating the sluggish waters of the Tonga. Not a cloud was to be seen in the glaring sky, and the overpowering scent of the poisonous tropical plants that lined the banks of the river contributed in no small degree to the nauseating effects of the dry and depressing atmosphere. The intense heat, which evoked a most unsavoury smell from the muddy and slimy deposits of rotten vegetation that were heaped on either side of the water, bore on its shoulders the seeds of those terrible twin scourges, the yellow fever and the cholera, which made life on that African station anything but a desirable existence. As far as the eye could reach, to the point where the dark river took a sudden turn and was lost to view behind the dense foliage, the waters resembled one broad sheet of molten glass. The palms and brilliant cacti were mirrored in its depths, and the reflection of the brig, which had dropped its anchor about a hundred yards from the shore, stood out in bold relief as though it had been in a looking-glass. But there were living creatures that revelled in the midst of this natural furnace, and could always be found where the mud was heaped highest and the ever-growing decay most offensive. These were the alligators, who were never so happy as when wallowing in the fetid garbage, and dozing off to sleep with their snouts only left open to the attacks of the myriads of stinging insects that swarmed above them.

These deadly waters were the haunts also of great ugly sharks, who lay in wait, armed with formidable rows of sharp merciless fangs, to seize the first unwary victim who chanced to come within their reach. Under the dark leaves of the trees upon its bank, which afforded such a grateful shade and seemed to invite repose, and amidst the rank grass at their roots, lurked venomous snakes, ever ready to dart their forked tongues at the foot that might disturb them, and the thick brushwood and tangled parasites sheltered smooth-footed leopards and fierce jungle cats, whose presence might be detected even in the daytime by occasional low angry snarls.

When night fell, the herds of hippopotami, or river horses, and the rhinoceri, came heavily trampling down every obstacle in their path as they sought the river bank to drink, and woe befell the unhappy native who might be in their way as they crashed through the undergrowth of the forest. Yet even in this deadly climate and amid such dangerous surroundings, the adventurous Englishman had been found bold enough to set up his habitation. On the left side of the river a small wharf, rudely constructed by the natives and approached by a steep flight of slippery wooden steps, led up to a bungalow, partly shaded by spreading palms or cocoanut trees, and which could boast of being (if nothing else) the only house which harboured English men (and even white men) for miles and miles around.

For the natives of the valley of the Tonga were the ebony-skinned sons of Africa, whose woolly pates and thick lips clearly betrayed their nationality, and whose treachery and barbarous cruelty stamped them as being the most inhuman and blood-thirsty creatures of the universe. Many a heartrending tale could the swarthy labourers employed at the station relate of the diabolical tortures they had seen inflicted by these fiends upon their innocent victims, and as not a few of them had undergone the horrors of slavery, they bore the blue wealds of the merciless lash on their bronzed shoulders, and looked back with horror to the time of their past servitude.

At the time my story opens, there sat in the central room of the small station, reclining in an easy-chair, with his feet resting on the edge of the mantelpiece, and watching with a sort of sullen indifference, the rings of blue smoke that curled upwards from his havanna, an Englishman called Jack Fairfield.

That his thoughts were not happy was evinced by the sorrowful and downcast expression of a somewhat haggard face for one-and-thirty. That he had battled against and been driven back by the tide of life was made palpable by the deep lines which were furrowed in the corners of his eyes and mouth. For whilst Jack Fairfield sat in Africa, his thoughts had travelled back to England, as he had known it years before. They had led him to a cottage standing by itself a few yards from the high road. There, under the old porch, nestled in a bower of honeysuckles and clematis, he saw once more in fancy the woman he had loved—the woman he had given up everything for—parents, home and money, and expatriated himself to that hateful district, where solitude and reflection made the remembrance of the past almost too terrible to bear.

How well he could recall the image of the sweet-faced, bonny girl who had been ready to swear at the altar to love and obey him, but whose guardians had stepped in between her lover and herself. They had arranged it all between themselves. He knew that Alice loved him as he loved her, and they had built up with

glad hearts their golden castle in the air, so soon to be pulled down to the very earth again. Alice's father was at sea, trading with his own vessel, the "Tredegar," and the maiden aunt could give no definite answer to Jack's proposal till he returned. So the lovers had a month or two in which to build that castle a few stories higher before it was rased to the ground. The downfall came all too soon. Captain Manley returned from sea, and Jack Fairfield sought an early interview with him. With a light step and heart he entered his presence—confident of success—and told his love-tale to Alice's father. But his reception was very different from what he had anticipated. Half-an-hour later he stepped into the hall again with a flushed face and clouded brow, and slamming the door after him, strode across the lawn, never once turning back to look at the house which contained everything he held most dear. Captain Manley had unconditionally refused him his daughter's hand. He considered her far too young to marry, and severely censured the carelessness of his sister in having permitted the intimacy. And when the "Tredegar" next put to sea, Alice Manley sailed in her. Meanwhile, Jack Fairfield had had but one desire—to leave England and his disappointment behind him. So a fortnight from that unhappy moment he was sailing down the Mersey *en route* for the Tonga, having accepted the first situation that fell in his way, and leaving no trace as to where he had taken flight.

Two years had passed since then, and though Fairfield and his partner—Rudge Martin—had been very prosperous and accumulated considerable wealth, our hero had never lost his somewhat morose and despondent temper, and had given up all ideas of ever becoming a married man. He had believed, however, that he had conquered his passion for Alice Manley, for he had never seen or heard of her since the day he left her father's presence with an oath upon his lips, and silence or separation generally prove effectual cures for disappointed lovers, but at last he had been forced to confess to himself that he was mistaken. For that morning, bounding into the room, notwithstanding the heat, had come the irrepressible Rudge Martin, knocking over a bamboo chair in his anxiety to reach his partner's side.

"What's the matter?" asked Fairfield testily.

"There's an enemy in the camp," cried Rudge.

"Niggers!" exclaimed Fairfield, suddenly rising, for they were obliged to be always on the watch against native treachery.

"No, old fellow, worse than that, a great deal. The enemy is a woman."

"Oh!" returned Fairfield with indifference, as he resumed his seat. "Black or white, eh?"

"White, my boy; white as a lily," exclaimed Rudge. "I've just ferreted her out. She's aboard that brig which is hauling alongside. Surely you will come down and get an introduction."

"What should I want an introduction to her for?" grumbled Fairfield. "I suppose she's the same as any other woman. The skipper's wife, most likely—fat, fair and forty."

"That she isn't," replied his partner; "she's his daughter. I've found out so much, and she's single into the bargain. Won't you come now?"

"No, thank you, Rudge."

"Well, you *are* a queer fellow," said Rudge in a tone of disappointment. "Why, the very sight of a woman ought to cheer you up in this beastly hole, instead of which it seems to annoy you. And I'm sure you'd be welcome. I've spoken to Captain Manley, and he seems a jolly sort of old fellow."

"Captain *who*?" shouted Jack Fairfield, throwing his cigar away.

"Manley, skipper of the 'Tredegar,'" repeated Rudge, little thinking of the importance of his information. "Shall we ask them to dinner?"

Jack stared at him for a few moments as though he had not comprehended his meaning, and then sank back in his seat, white as ashes.

"Shall I give Captain and Miss Manley an invitation to dine with us to-day?" repeated Rudge innocently.

"No, no! Certainly not! I'll have no strangers here. I don't want to know them," replied Jack gruffly, in order to hide his emotion.

"Very well, my boy, I'm off to dine with them instead, and I give you fair warning I shall make the running."

And so he had left his friend to chew the bitter cud of reflection, whilst the happy past kept floating before him like a tantalizing dream, and he wondered if Alice had quite forgotten him, and what she would say and think when she heard he was so near. But to subject himself to a second insult from Captain Manley. *That* was what he would rather die than undergo. And so he sat, half-excited, half-despondent, wondering what the day would bring forth for him.

Presently there might be heard a faint rustle in the clump of bamboos at the back of the bungalow, and a lithe figure crept softly across the dried herbage and stealthily ascended the wooden steps which led up to the verandah. It was the figure of a native woman, whose gaudy silken dress and gold bangles contrasted well with her bronzed skin and harmonized with the tropical surroundings. She was clad in a scarlet vest, which displayed part of her ample bosom, and a blue petticoat, which was girt round her loins with a strip of leopard's skin, and drooped gracefully below her knees. An ivory comb, inlaid with gold and precious stones, adorned her raven hair, and jewels hung from her nose and ears and lips. Glittering in the fierce light, a necklace of tigers' teeth encircled her throat, and she wore massive rings upon her fingers.

This was Una, Queen of the Antes, whose territory was called the Valley of Death, from the awful atrocities which had been committed there. A queen, invested with regal rights, governing a tribe of hostile natives, and possessing the power to prevent others from trading on the coast or holding any communication with the savages of the interior. All this Jack Fairfield knew well, and he considered it was policy on his part to humour the queen and keep in her majesty's good graces; and with that end in view, when the dusky sovereign visited the white man—which she had been much in the habit of doing lately—he generally paid her a great many unnecessary compliments. And unfortunately Queen Una received his flattery and his attentions in a different light from what Fairfield intended. He was a handsome man, tall and well-made, with a fair skin and blue eyes, and the black queen greatly admired him, and would have liked him for a lover. She thought, too, that he was enamoured of herself, and that some day he would be her lord and govern her domains, and take her to the Big Country she had heard so much of, where she would palaver with her sister, the White Queen. And she never dreamt that the white man who was in her power would dare to reject her addresses.

Noiselessly moving the grass mat that hung in the doorway, Queen Una peeped into the apartment. Fairfield was lying back in his chair, dreaming of England and his lost love. Her entrance did not disturb him, so she grew bolder, and with agile steps bounded to his side, fawning upon him as a tigress would in the presence of her acknowledged master.

Fairfield rose angrily, with a suppressed oath upon his lips. He was in no humour for jest that afternoon, and this unlooked for visit annoyed him.

"You very happy see me?" asked the queen, not at all discomposed by his gestures of annoyance.

"Oh, very happy, Una, very happy indeed," he rejoined carelessly; "only I'm very busy to-day, and you can't stay."

"Me only stay little while—me come long way to see white man, and bring him present. Me givee you dat," said Una, placing a small native talisman in his hand. "Dat keep you well and strong—dat make you lub Una——"

"But I *do* love you, Una. I have often told you so," he said, as he placed the talisman on the mantelshelf.

"Den if you lub me, givee me *dat*," replied Una artfully, as she touched a small ring he wore on the little finger of his left hand. It was the only gift that his lost Alice had ever given him, and he had worn it by night and day ever since.

The queen's request, and the recollections it brought with it, overcame his prudence.

"No, no," he cried, "I cannot give you that, Una. It is a talisman too; I must not part with it."

Queen Una's brown breast heaved with quicker throbs, and her flashing eyes, which were full of malice and deceit, grew ominously darker at his refusal.

"White woman givee you dat?" she inquired cunningly.

Fairfield did not seem to notice the drift of her words. She had recalled his trouble to him, and it was a sort of relief to tell her of it. She was a woman, and might sympathize with him, and he wanted sympathy dreadfully, poor fellow, although he hardly acknowledged it to himself.

"Yes, Una," he answered, "a white woman gave me that—a white woman whom I loved very dearly. But her people would not give her to me, so I have lived all alone. And to-day I hear she is close to me—in that ship coming into harbour—and yet I dare not see her. Isn't it hard?"

"And you lovee dis white gal better dan anybody?" said Queen Una.

"I love her better than all the world! I would *die* for her," said poor Fairfield, with a suspicious sound like tears in his voice.

Slowly and haughtily the Queen of the Antes drew herself away from him. She had come quite prepared to make him an offer of marriage. She had given him the most powerful love talisman that she possessed, and he turned his back on it, and her! There was no deception in her looks this time. Her blood was boiling with a desire for revenge.

"I go," she said calmly, with her teeth set. "I leavee you with white woman in ship. Nebber you fear. You will see her very soon. Una feel dat. Good-bye, white man, good-bye!"

And she sped down the ladder and through the thicket, with the agility of a leopard. Fairfield was relieved when she was gone. He had taken but little notice of her words and she worried him. He was indistinctly conscious that she had wished him joy, and that no joy was possible for him, and the knowledge made him irritable and anxious to be alone. The next day a number of petty chiefs arrived at the station to exchange their palm oil, ebony and ivory for the general cargo of bright coloured stuffs, useless muskets and glass beads, Captain Manley had brought out with him, and Rudge Martin had his hands full to attend to them, receiving no help from Fairfield, whose fit of despondency had increased to such a degree that he preferred to remain shut up in his own room. A thousand times he asked himself should he run the gauntlet of another insult at Captain Manley's hands, and dare all things only to see Alice and find out whether she still cared for him. But that entailed going on board the "*Tredegarr*," and he had not the courage to do it. Rudge must surely have mentioned his name before the skipper and his daughter, he thought, and if they wished to renew their acquaintance with him they were quite able to do so. But as he was listening moodily at dinner-time to the comical tales Rudge related to him concerning the antics of the

native chiefs, who had nearly blown off their own arms and legs in their attempts to fire the guns they had bartered for, a sudden commotion was heard in the verandah, and Captain Manley, in a terrible state of excitement, made his appearance before them.

"What's the matter, sir?" inquired Rudge Martin, as he caught sight of him.

"Matter enough," cried Manley. "My daughter is missing. She left the ship this evening to take a stroll along the banks of the river, and I'll lay anything she's been carried off by some of these accursed blacks."

"Alice missing? God help us!" exclaimed Jack Fairfield in a voice of distress.

Captain Manley turned to him in amazement.

"You here?" he said quickly. "I heard the name of Fairfield, but had no idea it was the same man I had known in England. Have you any authority, any power? Can you help me in this terrible extremity?"

"If Miss Manley has really been taken prisoner and any one can help you, sir, Jack Fairfield will," said Rudge heartily; "why, he knows every step of the ground, and the queen of the tribe into the bargain."

"Yes; and she shall answer to me for this outrage," exclaimed Fairfield, with a clenched hand, as he remembered their late interview. "This is the doing of that she-devil, Rudge, you may depend on it. We must rescue Miss Manley from her clutches," he continued vehemently, "or die. Captain, get all your men together, and bring as much ammunition as you can carry, whilst Martin and I collect our little gang. We must hurry up, or we may be too late."

"Mr. Fairfield, how can I thank you sufficiently?" cried the father, with tears standing in his eyes. "Only rescue my poor girl from those devils, and you shall have whatever you may ask from me. She has suffered more than enough since I parted her from you."

"You have given me fresh courage, Captain Manley, but we must stay for nothing now. Alice's safety depends on our dispatch."

And in ten minutes from that time, the plucky little band was ready to start. All told, they numbered but five-and-twenty. Five-and-twenty started to attempt to rescue a woman, whilst they stood every chance of being overwhelmed and completely annihilated by as many hundreds.

There were eight white men from the "Tredegar," and two from the station, with fifteen blacks, all well armed with rifles, revolvers and boarding-pikes. But what a meagre army to lead into the field! Four men were kept aboard the brig, with orders to haul into the stream, and see that the sails were loosed, and the cables ready for slipping.

And then the brave little band dashed fearlessly into the jungle, on their road to the Valley of Death.

All that night they pushed on, through the thorny thickets which kept their hands scratched and bleeding; through the dense undergrowth which brushed against their faces, making them smart with pain; crossing fords and deep rivulets, where sharp crags, hidden by the black waters, tore their flesh and left them struggling ankle deep in the stinking mud, till just before daybreak they halted to reconsider the plan of campaign.

Fortunately, outposts had been stationed in case of alarm, for before the fatigued men had had any rest, the forward sentry reported that he could hear a confused noise, like the chatter of many voices, and could also make out the smoke of a fire not very distant from the spot on which they had halted for their consultation. To reconnoitre was their next movement, and they discovered that in the centre of a clearing, bounded by the river on one side and an almost impenetrable thicket of palms and yuá trees on the other, were assembled some hundreds of natives, with Queen Una seated in their midst. This was the court of the celebrated Valley of Death, the name alone of which was sufficient to strike terror into the hearts of those who heard it. At the feet of the queen, bound hand and foot with strong swathes of grass, lay Alice Manley, more dead than alive, as she contemplated the dreadful fate before her. She could not understand their language, but she knew she was at the mercy of a horde of blood-thirsty savages, and she expected nothing less than a cruel death. Had she known the doom that had been pronounced upon her she would have swooned with fear. Queen Una's commands were that the white woman was to be flayed alive, her eyes were to be gouged out, and (after other injuries, too horrible to describe, had been inflicted on her) she was to be roasted before a slow fire until she died.

As Jack Fairfield saw Alice lying there, bound and helpless, in the hands of her enemy, he vowed to rescue her or to die by her side, and Captain Manley and Rudge Martin had the greatest difficulty to restrain him from rushing headlong in the midst of the savages, to be pierced by a hundred spears and poisoned arrows.

"My Alice!" he exclaimed; "my darling, unforgotten girl. Oh, Captain Manley, if you but knew——"

"Hush, hush! my boy, I *do* know. These two last days have opened my eyes to much that I never saw before. Your courage and intrepidity and faith—her silent, patient suffering. I never thought how great they both were. God forgive me for having kept you two asunder. But now believe me, Fairfield; she is yours."

"Mine in death," he muttered.

"Don't say that, Jack. It's not like you to lose heart," cried Rudge cheerily.

"Ah, Rudge, you have never had such a stake at issue. But in life or in death, she shall yet be mine—my peerless Alice. Come, boys!" he continued, as he dashed his hand across his eyes, "to your places, and without a sound."

Hastily forming their plan of attack, they resolved to win the game by stratagem. A few of their party were to steal round, under cover of the dense foliage, to the further side of the enemy, and fire a volley into their midst and then retreat, forming a semicircle.

The other half of the little band would then repeat the tactic, which would make the natives believe they were greater in number than they really were, and both sides, meeting in the centre opposite the river, were to make a determined stand against them, whilst Jack Fairfield, with two sturdy shellbacks, was to attempt the rescue of Alice Manley. Without the least warning, the first volley re-echoed through the stillness of the morning air, and flashed upon the startled assembly. Queen Una leapt to her feet and tried to gain the entrance of her leafy palace, but before she and her attendants had time to turn in another direction, a second report thundered at their backs, leaving many of their number to bite the dust. Amazed and startled by this unexpected onslaught, the savages made for the centre of the brushwood, which was their only chance of beating a retreat, but they were met there by another shower of leaden bullets, directed by experienced hands, and a cheer such as only Englishmen bent on victory can send forth from their lungs. Using their revolvers with the utmost advantage—thrusting the black rascals back with their boarding-pikes, and thrashing them down with the butt-ends of their rifles—the attacking party completely routed their opponents (who were quite ignorant of their paltry number), and the savages fled into the jungle, leaving the traders to gain a signal victory.

Then it was that Jack Fairfield, unable to restrain himself any longer, rushed forward and clasped Alice Manley in his arms. At the sight of her unforgotten lover, the poor girl could bear up no longer, but closing her eyes, fainted dead away upon his breast. It took but a few moments to release her from the cruel thongs that had cut into her tender flesh, and then, raising her in his strong clasp, Fairfield bore her to a place of comparative safety. As her eyes opened to consciousness again, and she saw her father and Jack Fairfield gazing at her, and felt the warm pressure of her lover's lips, she reddened like a rose in June.

"Oh, Jack! is it possible, or am I dreaming? I heard that you were here, dear, but to see you and my father thus——"

"It is all right, my darling," cried Jack; "thank God that you are safe, and that you are to be my wife."

"Father!" said Alice wonderingly.

"It is true, my dear child. I know that you love him, and I promised him if he saved your life that I would give you to him."

"Oh, I am so happy," murmured Alice, as she closed her eyes again.

But much as Jack would have liked to remain by her side, this was no time for sentiment, and so leaving her in the charge of one of the sailors, the rest of the party returned to the place of attack. Honest Rudge Martin, who had fought as pluckily as the rest, had been wounded by a spear and had to be borne on the shoulders of four blacks, who proceeded to convey him, with the rest, in the direction of the station. But Queen Una was not going to suffer such an easy conquest, and after the first rebuff, she mustered her warriors to be avenged. Bravely the little English gang retraced their steps, worn out as they were, and encumbered with a weak woman and a helpless man, yet every moment, drawing closer and closer, they could hear the beating of the tom-toms and the savage yells of their pursuers.

Queen Una had given her soldiers full licence to murder and to loot, and they were determined to beat the English back into the town, to demolish the station and the shipping, and to put every creature they could capture to the torture.

When at last, exhausted and worn out, the Europeans reached the bungalow, the natives (headed by their warlike queen) were not four hundred yards behind them. To attempt to make a stand against such numbers was out of the question. It would have been simply to sacrifice their own lives and those dependent on them, so with the most marvellous alacrity they made for the boats and pushed off for the "Tredegar."

Jack Fairfield alone remained behind with two of his trustiest men. Then, at the very last moment, fighting their way hand to hand through a dozen or more blood-thirsty niggers, they jumped into the boat and rowed off, whilst arrows and spears fell thick around them. The warriors of Queen Una sent forth a wild shout of despair when they were convinced of the safety of their white opponents, which was almost immediately succeeded by a tremendous report and an unearthly yell, mingled with agonizing shrieks and groans, as their arms, legs and heads were scattered to the four winds of heaven.

Jack Fairfield and his companions had remained behind to lay and ignite a small train of powder, and the magazine had blown up, destroying the coveted stores with itself, and completely devastating the station and all that belonged to it.

The Queen of the Antes had been balked of her revenge upon her lover, and that night she closed her eyes in death, as she had been struck by a stray bullet from the brig as she stood inciting her followers to fresh exertions.

But when the first shock was over, and Rudge was pronounced to be out of danger, how happy they all were on board the "Tredegar," as she ploughed the waves on her way home to England.

Captain Manley made no further objections to Jack Fairfield as a son-in-law, and he and Alice were in the seventh heaven of delight.

They have been married for several years now, and settled in the old country, but Jack has not yet given over relating the story of his dangerous friendship with the swarthy Queen Una, and his adventures in the Valley of Death.

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## A NEW OTHELLO.

A NOVEL,

By IZA DUFFUS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF "LOVE, HONOUR AND OBEDY," "NOT EASILY JEALOUS," "ONLY A LOVE STORY,"  
"LOVE IN IDLENESS," ETC., ETC.

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### CHAPTER XX.

THE HAND AND THE WILL.

"Charms that allay not any longing—  
Spells that appease not any grief!"

THE chemist's assistant, a stolid and silent young man who did his business without talking, served Mr. Percival—whom he knew by sight—with the hydrocyanic acid, putting on an enormous label of "Poison" in black letters that nearly covered the phial, and, according to the law regulating the sale of poisons, entered the transaction, with name, date and address in full, in a big book.

Ray slipped the phial into the breast-pocket of his overcoat, and was about to leave the shop when he caught sight of something that made him stop suddenly and take a step back. In the middle of the village street, almost in front of the chemist's shop, two gentlemen in a dog-cart had pulled up and halted to speak to a third who was passing; and in the occupants of the vehicle Ray recognized two of his fellow-passengers on that eventful voyage out to Canada.

He knew their faces and figures instantly, remembered their voices too—O'Brien's genial touch of brogue, Digby's Transatlantic accent. Their attention was fixed on the friend whom they had halted to greet; they were not looking in Ray's direction; they did not see or notice him, as he stood partly screened behind the half-open glass door; but *he saw them* only too plainly, heard what they were saying—heard with dismay O'Brien's loud and hearty voice answer to something the pedestrian said:

"No, not to-morrow; we're going up to lunch at the big hotel—the 'Hygeia'—to-morrow!"

Ray moved back another step, pale with dismay and intense annoyance, and stared abstractedly, with eyes that did not see what they looked upon, along the ranks of bottles ranged on the

shelves, until in a couple of minutes the dog-cart rattled on and carried out of his view those fellow-travellers whose faces had been about the most unwelcome sight he could have seen. What unlucky chance had brought them here? And they were coming to the Hygeia Hotel to-morrow—they, who could not fail to remember both Asenath and himself—who might, nay, in all probability would, in their natural recognition and greeting of their fellow-travellers, unconsciously betray the secret that Asenath had charged him to keep! What would she say, and what could he do to save her from the compromising and false position into which, as he now felt remorsefully, his recklessness had forced her?

On his way back to the hotel, he made up his mind that the first thing to do was to find Asenath, speak to her and consult her as to what course they had best take. His thoughts entirely occupied with this new subject of disquietude, he paused in the hall, wondering where she was; the last time he had seen her she had been in the drawing-room. He glanced first into the reading-room, then passed on into the drawing-rooms, looked into all three, and into the conservatories; others were there, but no sign of Asenath. On the other side of the hall were the writing and dining rooms; he looked into the writing-room and there found his mother, Kate and Eileen.

"Well, Ray?" asked Mrs. Percival looking up anxiously.

"Well?"

For the moment, in his solicitude about this untoward meeting and its probable effect upon Asenath, he had forgotten the poor dog and his errand, as he looked round in search for *her*—in vain; she was not there.

"And have you been to see poor Ponto?" his mother continued.

Before he replied, Kate struck in:

"I would not poison him now, Ray, really, if I were you! I'm sure he's not suffering so much—and there's something so horrid in the idea of killing a creature you've been fond of."

"But, still, wouldn't you rather do it yourself than that any one else should?" said Eileen.

"That's it, Eily," replied Ray. "If my dog has to be killed, I'll do it. But did you say, Kitty, that he's better?"

"He is not howling now, he is quite quiet; we have just been to see him—I am sure he cannot be in such pain. I do think, Ray, it would be cruel to poison him."

"Well, I'll see," said Ray. "You may be sure I don't want to give poor old Ponto the dose unless it's absolutely necessary as a matter of common humanity."

"I don't think it can be necessary, dear, as the poor fellow does not seem conscious of any suffering now," observed Mrs. Percival.

He left them to go and see the dog, and passed into the court-

yard. The arcades here, fringed by their tall ferns and dwarf palms, surrounding the fountain with its pleasant plashing and its crystal pool full of darting, gleaming gold fish, were a favourite lounge; and here he came upon the object of his search. Dr. and Mrs. Fitzallan, Lady May and Mr. Bartram were seated here chatting, the gentlemen smoking--the courtyard being a privileged place for indulgence in that luxury.

Ray stopped and joined the group. He took up his position by Asenath's chair. He saw that it was impossible to hope for any private conversation with her now and here; but if he could manage to slip a word into her ear aside, he might induce her to grant him a few minutes' *tête-à-tête* elsewhere.

"I am so sorry your poor dog is hurt," she said, looking up at him kindly.

"Yes; my poor old Ponto!" he replied regretfully.

"I have been to see him," she continued, "and it is a comfort that he does not seem to be in pain now; he is in a sort of sleep."

As he leant over Asenath's chair he was watching anxiously for his opportunity; and in a few minutes, while Dr. Fitzallan was deep in discourse with Lady May, he seized the chance of bending a little closer and dropping into her ear the cautiously whispered words:

"I've something to say to you--important. I *must* speak to you privately. *When?*"

He managed this aside with a very successfully cool and easy expression, as if he were merely making some casual remark; and Asenath was equally successful in the apparent nonchalance with which she heard it. Most women are born actresses. Asenath was not one of the few exceptions to the rule. Barely glancing into his face, in the course of a minute or two she glided an answering whisper with a light and indifferent smile.

"I am going into the orangery--presently."

To the orangery accordingly, as soon as he could disengage himself from the group without suspicious abruptness, Ray took his way.

Asenath's motive, which had occurred to her on the spur of the moment, for naming the orangery, was that it was a safe resort; it was reached through the dining-room, which at that hour of the afternoon was likely to be empty, and there was but one entrance to it--it had no dangerous *portières* nor side doors, behind which eavesdroppers might lurk or innocent passers-by overhear.

It was always very warm in the orangery, and Ray took off the overcoat which he had kept on until now, and hung it up in the side passage which led out of the main hall to the dining-room. He would not go upstairs for fear of missing her. He lingered about the hall and dining-room waiting for her. He was always carefully considerate of Asenath in little things, although he had been recklessly regardless of her interests, and cruelly jeopardized

her fair fame by his selfish rashness in that one all-important step of pursuing her to Canada. He felt, with a natural instinct of delicacy, that it would jar less upon her feelings for them to keep up the appearance of meeting by chance and sauntering casually together into the orangery, than for her either to wait for him or to join him there.

In a few minutes, which seemed very long ones to him, she came, and they passed through the dining-room into the orangery together.

A glance at her face showed him that although she had consented to make and keep this tryst with him, it was merely from a sense of necessity—a conviction that he must indeed have something grave to impart to her, or he would never have dared to claim the right, as if of a private understanding with her, to fix a rendezvous. She resented his request, although she had felt herself forced for her own interests to comply with it; her pride revolted against this stolen interview, although she realized that for her own sake she must ascertain what strange new development of the position had emboldened Ray to ask for it. She feared that his "important" business could be nothing agreeable for him to tell or her to hear; and it was in no amicable nor softening mood that she faced him and demanded coldly:

"Well, what is it you want with me?"

"I should not have troubled you without a reason."

"What is your reason?"

"It is something I think you ought to know, though I am afraid it will—annoy—you, as it has annoyed me," he said, devoutly wishing that the earth would open and swallow him as he saw the cold light of her grey eyes darken to angry gloom.

"Tell me what it is—at once and plainly, please."

"Those two fellows, O'Brien and Digby, who went out on the 'Sicilian'—you remember them? They are here; I saw them driving in Meriton High Street. They did not see me; but I saw them, and heard them talking."

"Well, is there anything more?" she inquired.

"I heard O'Brien say that they were coming here—to the 'Hygeia'—to lunch to-morrow."

"Anything more?" she rejoined, with a bitter curl of her lip.

"No; is not that enough?"

"Quite enough!" she replied in the same icy tone. "And pray, have you determined what is to be done?"

"God knows," he said desperately; "I don't. That is what I wanted to ask you. I put myself into your hands." He waited for her answer, but as she made none, only looked at him with those darkened eyes of cold anger, he added, "I—I can only think of one thing."

"What is that?"

"I'll keep out of their way if possible, and if they do come

across me, I might—might just drop them a hint—they're gentlemanly fellows, both of them—that—that, I didn't want my trip out on the 'Sicilian' talked about. If I just ask them, I feel sure they would—would not say a word."

Her pale cheeks crimsoned with a wrathful flush.

"And they would see *me*, and guess *why* you asked them for their silence! Is this the only thing you can suggest to me? to place my name, my character, at the mercy, the discretion of these strangers? Plead guilty to a secret that looks like—like——" She broke off as if she could not force herself to utter the words that were at her lips; she gazed at him with a look of implacable anger and revolt.

"There should be nothing, not a sign or syllable to connect *you* with it," he protested eagerly; "it should be supposed to be some business—some affair of my own that I did not care to have publicly spoken of; there should be *nothing* to bring your name in."

"Do you think these men are blind?" she retorted scornfully. "Do you think your transparent feint of 'business' of your own would delude them? You would only make matters worse; make the secret seem a shameful one, more shameful than it is." She spoke in low, clear, cold tones of concentrated bitterness. Her features were set like marble, but her eyes were like dark flames of wrath. "I might have known," she added, "that something of this kind would happen at last—would be the end of that mad freak of yours! Well, have you anything more to say to me?"

"Have *you* no more to say to *me*? nothing to tell me, no wish of yours to direct me?"

"What more should I have to say to you, now or ever any more? Are you not satisfied yet with what you have done for me? I have said and seen and heard enough; I will have no more of this! The one thing you can do for me," she went on passionately, "is to leave me alone, now and always; to spare me the sight of your face, the sound of your voice. Your very presence is hateful to me!"

"Don't, don't," he muttered, stepping back with his hands clenched convulsively, his face death-white to the lips. "When you speak to me—look at me—like *that*—you put murder into my heart. You make me feel as if I must *kill* you."

"No, don't do that!" she said, with a bitter smile; "leave that to one who will probably save you the trouble when he finds out all this."

"What do you mean?" he rejoined quickly, his anger, the fiery wrath of wounded love, suddenly breaking into anxiety and alarm for her. "You don't mean that you are—that you have any reason to be *afraid* of—of——"

"I am *not* afraid," she interrupted him, drawing up her head haughtily, with passionate scorn. "What should I be afraid of? You have spoilt my life for me!"

Never had Asenath been so carried away by anger before. As a rule, she held her temper in firm control, and only manifested her resentment by cold and cutting words that often struck deeper than blows. But for once her self-command had failed her; she had allowed herself to give way to a paroxysm of passionate wrath. More angry with Ray because she was angry with herself for yielding to this impulse of temper, she darted one last look of fiery reproach at him, and turned and swept away with the air of an insulted queen.

If she had left him a few moments earlier she might have seen her husband pass, with his quiet, deliberate step, out of the side-passage where Ray had left his overcoat hanging up. Ray, leaving the orangery a few minutes after her, was in no mood to think of either the coat or the contents of its breast-pocket. Presently, when he went out to the yard to see poor Ponto—whom he found lying in a kind of stupor, scarcely to be roused even by his master's voice—he remembered it. The stableman said he thought the animal was dying, but would die without any fresh attack of pain, and Ray thought it unnecessary to kill his dog unless there was a relapse into the distressing suffering, which seemed now past. On his way up to his room he fetched his overcoat from the passage, carried it upstairs with him, and taking the little phial out of the pocket, was about to set it down on the mantel-piece, when, with an unusual access of caution and discretion, he bethought himself that it was a most dangerous poison to leave about, so he put it into his desk and locked it up hastily, without examining it closely.

"Dr. Fitzallan," said Mrs. Percival a little later on, "Eileen doesn't seem at all well to-day. I think she has caught cold and has got her old pain. I wish you would kindly just step up and see her."

"With pleasure," he assented, and Kate accompanied him upstairs and showed him to her sister's room.

It was not often that he, leaving his quarters in the Pavilion, had any reason for visiting the corridor where the rooms of Mr. Carresford's party were situated; and he had never once been up there that various members of that happy and sociable party were not fitting in and out of each other's rooms. Now, as he and Kate passed along the corridor, Lady May's door was open, and she called to "Kitty" to come in, and as he went in to see Eileen he heard Ray come out of his room.

He was alone with Eileen. Kate and May were shut in the latter's room talking. Ray had gone downstairs. No one was near or likely to disturb him and his patient. In the silence whilst he willed her into the mesmeric sleep, it seemed that the voice, which had whispered to him before, spoke again, and told him that the chance which had seemed so difficult to find, was now and here. Having a quick eye and a good memory, he had a

tolerably accurate idea of the arrangement of the rooms. Ray's was at the end of the corridor, the next was Eileen's, then Kate's, then Lady May's, then the sitting-room, then Mrs. Percival's room, and next to that the apartment occupied by a Mr. and Mrs. Blackstone, who had been in possession before the Carresford party arrived, and were the only interlopers who came in between its members, cutting off Geoffrey's room from the others. Next to their room was a short passage, crossing the corridor at right angles, and a large glass door leading out on to the balcony; and on the other side of this cross-passage was the last room of the Carresfords' suite, Geoffrey's own apartment.

Having put Eileen into a deep sleep, Fitzallan opened the door quietly and glanced up and down the corridor. Two or three of the room-doors were open, and a chambermaid was dusting something at the head of the stairs. It was always so! No safe and secure opportunity of private access to any of the rooms during the busy daylight life here. Always the chance—nay, the probability, of some one passing or coming suddenly out from some of those many doors. And at night there was still less opportunity for him, lodging as he did in the Pavilion, and with no reason for haunting the Carresford corridor. He looked out of the window, up and down the balcony. All the windows opened nearly down to the ground, so that the occupants of these rooms were constantly stepping in and out. He stood reflecting deeply, his hand on something which he had hidden in his breast, for a minute or two, then turned to his patient, whom he had left leaning back on her sofa.

Pale, still, and serene, she lay in a dream-like immobility, deeper than ordinary sleep; her individual soul-life suspended; her physical life and animal intelligence in the hollow of his hand, for him to deal with as he would. Hers was a nature sensitive as an Æolian harp, yet at his will its tremulous chords were stilled and dumb; even the hands of her own kindred might sweep over them in vain; no breath save his could wake them; he, and he alone, could evoke from them whatever strain he chose.

Yet, withal, his power over her was not absolute. One only instinct endured in her, which even in the subjugation of the magnetic trance he could not conquer. It possessed every element, pervaded all the principles of life in her. Even when the higher faculties of emotion and intellect were in abeyance, that one feeling—rather an instinct than a passion—inherent in her very life, endured unconquerable. He could never extinguish her love for Geoffrey; but he could direct the force he could not destroy, and make it his tool.

"Eileen," he said, "a little while ago you were sorrowful—unhappy. Are you unhappy still?"

"Always," she answered, in the level, dreamy tone usual to her in the entranced state. "But——" the faint, sweet voice just uttered this syllable and paused.

"But, what?"

"But I do not mind, so long as no one knows it."

"No one does know; and no one shall know, be assured, my child. You remember I told you once that I might be able to help you some day! The day has come. I can help you now. Will you obey me and be guided by me entirely, Eileen?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever heard of such things as magic potions—love-philtres?"

"I have heard of them."

"I have in my possession now, at this hour, one which will surely turn the heart of the man who drinks it to the woman who loves him best. No matter if he has believed himself to love another, let him take this, and his eyes will be cleared, he will know whose heart is the truest, who loves him the best, and he will love her in return. But it must be administered in secret. If he who rules that tender heart of yours drinks this, Eileen—your affection will be rewarded—and *returned*. He will be parted from her who has come between you and your heart's desire—he will turn to you for happiness, and find the joy of his life in you. Nor will any harm or wrong be done to *her*, for she does not love him as you do, and she will find happiness apart from him, as you and he will find it together. A power stronger than that of life is in this little bottle; it has the power of parting and of uniting. I place this power in your hands, my child; and you will use it as I tell you."

"I will!" she said with a faint, dream-like smile.

He bent nearer to her and spoke on in a deeper, lower voice, with a certain abruptness in his tone. He put questions; she answered in the same brief, monosyllabic, impassive and submissive way. Then his voice sank almost to a deep whisper; but his words sank into her soul like pebbles dropped into clear waters, there to lie still, fixed and moveless, beneath the surface of her waking senses, and bide their time.

"Well, and is she feeling better now?" asked "Momie's" soft and kindly voice at the door. "Oh, you have got her to sleep, I see; shall I disturb her?"

"Oh, no, you cannot disturb her. But I think I would let her sleep a few minutes longer."

He waited until Mrs. Percival had passed on to May's room to call Kate, and then, bending over Eileen, holding both her passive hands in his, "Wake now," he said, "and *forget*! Forget all I have bade you do until the time comes! When the time comes, *do it*! and when the time has passed, forget it again, and forget it for ever! Now, open your eyes, Eileen! Wake up!"

"And how are you, Eily dear? Why, you're looking much brighter!" said Mrs. Percival when she returned.

"Oh, yes, Momie darling, I have a kind of soft, soothed, pleasant

feeling, as if I had had some strange, sweet dream. It is such a curious feeling, as if I had seen something beautiful, and it was gone and forgotten as quick as a flash—and I can't imagine what it was—it is all gone—lost !”

## CHAPTER XXI.

## IN AN EVIL HOUR.

“This is the night  
That either makes me or foredoes me quite !”

THAT evening Eileen was just sufficiently well to come down to dinner; but her head still throbbed so much that after the dinner she thought it better to go up to her room than to remain in the brightly-lighted drawing-rooms, where the music and the babble of talk and laughter were not the most congenial company for a headache; she therefore went upstairs, and finding a softly-shaded lamp, and an inviting fire in the family sitting-room, she established herself comfortably on the sofa there, drawn close to the table whereon Mudie's latest were temptingly displayed, in case she felt inclined to read. There Mrs. Fitzallan presently found her on coming up to inquire after the invalid, and there she sat down by Eileen's side and stayed a little while, chatting in her softly cheerful and pleasant way; for if she was often frigid and haughty and impatient with Ray, she was never anything but amiable and gentle with Eileen, and the very sound of her clear, low voice was soothing to any one suffering or disturbed in mind or body. Even Ray had experienced its soft and soothing qualities, although certainly he had not been favoured with much of its sweetness of late. Since that afternoon's interview, when she had scathed him with the passion of her bitter anger, and swept away from him in implacable resentment, leaving him without an indication of her wishes in the matter of his dealing with their unwelcome fellow-travellers if they should meet on the morrow, he had not spoken a syllable to her, and had even endeavoured to avoid so much as looking at her. He ought to have been pretty well used to Asenath's outbursts of bitterness and asperity by this time; but they stung and stabbed him just as deeply still as in those first days when he had writhed beneath her not unjust reproaches.

He had never gone near her all that evening, had carefully avoided her since she left him in the orangery; but presently, going up to his room, as he passed along the corridor, he heard her voice in their sitting-room bidding Eileen good-night, and as he drew near the door, by mere chance—if there is such a thing as chance—Asenath came out, closed the door behind her, turned in his direction, and seeing him approaching face to face with her, she came to an involuntary pause, glancing at him uncertainly, as

if she half wished, yet hesitated, to speak to him. He paused too, and they looked at each other, he with an eager, asking gaze, she with a certain indecision and embarrassment in her manner. He saw that her irresolute attitude was not one of repulsion, that there was even a sort of mute appeal in her glance, and he took a quick step to her side.

"May I speak a few words to you?" he said in a low voice, with careful deference, ready on the instant to accept a repulse and draw back, only seeking to know her wishes. She hesitated a moment, then slightly and half-reluctantly bent her head in assent. He glanced up and down the corridor. Eileen, he knew, was in the parlour Asenath had just left. There was no other sitting-room on that floor; and the public corridor was no place for *their* few words, however few they might be. He looked at the passage which crossed the corridor at right angles and led out on to the glass-roofed balcony, and then glanced interrogatively at her. She accepted the silent suggestion, and took her way to the balcony, turning along it to the left, so as to be out of the range of view from the lighted windows on the right—those on the left-hand side of the passage—Geoffrey's among them—being dark. Ray followed her at a discreet and respectful distance.

"Is it of your own free will you let me speak to you now?" he asked in a low voice. "You do not think that I am 'forcing' myself upon you?" for the old accusation still rankled in his heart.

"No," she replied in an even lower voice; and speaking slowly, and as if reluctantly compelling herself, she added, "I have a word that I feel I ought to say to you."

"Say it."

She hesitated a moment, and then rejoined softly but clearly, "I—I think I was very hard on you to-day——"

"You *were*," he answered briefly; "but I have no right to say you were *too* hard."

"Yes, I was too hard," she replied. "I was wrong to lay all the blame on you——"

"You were not wrong; it fairly rests on me—and only on me."

"The original fault was yours; but mine has been as fatal a mistake. I ought to have had courage to be true, to follow an open and straightforward course; I see now that to face the trouble at the first would have been best. I was wrong in trying to escape it—to save and screen myself by secrecy from an annoyance which at the worst could not have been as bad as that which threatens me now. I was in the wrong when I committed myself—and *you*—to a course of falsehood. It was not wholly for my own sake either——"

"Not for *mine*?" he said with a sudden thrill in his voice. "You did not think—I never dared to hope you gave a thought—to *me* in the matter?"

"Whether I thought only of myself, or for us both, I see now that it was a terrible mistake I made, and I ought not to have resented my own misjudgment so severely upon you. Will you—forgive—me for it?"

"I forgive you? A thousand—thousand times!" he protested passionately. "If you could only know how bitterly I reproach *myself*! That I have been the cause of trouble to you is the one thing in my life for which I can never forgive myself."

She drew back from him as he took a step closer to her; but her shrinking movement seemed more timid and appealing than repellant.

"We have no time to waste," she said rather hurriedly; "let us think now what is to be done. You heard these people say they were coming here to lunch to-morrow? Having gone so far in the wrong course—wrong though it is—I fear that we had best pursue it. It is too late for disclosures *now*. We must, if possible, evade now what we ought to have faced earlier. If I keep my room, on pretence of a headache, can you devise for yourself some excuse for being out all day?"

"With the greatest ease," he said eagerly.

"If we are both absent," she continued, "this may be tided over—unless, indeed, these people make acquaintance with the party, and *your* name and *mine* come up, and the subject of the voyage."

"And that is not likely," he said reassuringly. "They will certainly not put strangers at *our* table. There will probably be no communication at all; these strangers will sit at the long general table, and, not seeing either of us, will be brought into no contact with any of our party."

"That is what we must hope; though I cannot conceal from myself that this plan of mine is only making things worse, if by any unlucky chance the—story—ever does come out. By my own persistence in concealment, I shall only have made matters a hundred times worse," she said, but not irresolutely, rather steadily facing the fact. Indeed, what would she not have faced now, sooner than risk bringing Ray into collision with her husband?

"It will—it must be—all right," he assured her. "It is not for myself I care a jot—but for *you*!" he added with deep and anxious tenderness. "Your words to-day—those last words of yours—went through my heart like a hot iron; they are burning there now. Tell me that you did not mean—you cannot apprehend—any danger to yourself, even in the event of the whole story of my fault and folly coming out? There is no fear—no *possibility*—of your being subjected to any—ill-treatment?"

"If there were, you could not help me."

"For God's sake tell me the truth!" he urged. "Have you any grounds for apprehension? any reason for personal fear?"

"I have no reason."

"Are you sure?" he pressed her; "for I cannot forget what I saw last night; the thought of it has been nearly driving me mad to-day."

"Last night?" she repeated interrogatively.

"Your arm was hurt," he said; "I know it; I saw your face. If you only knew what a coward and brute I felt to stand by and see it! If I had not felt that you did not wish me to interfere, I could not have controlled myself."

"If you *had* interfered I would never—never have forgiven you. Remember that, now and for always! Under any circumstances, on any occasion, the slightest intervention, even a *look* of yours, would do me the cruellest—cruellest harm. For my sake you must never—*never* by look or word or sign, interfere—not under *any* circumstances," she repeated with a vehemence rare in her.

"God knows, I would not do you harm," he said; "but when you say 'under *any* circumstances,' why, there are limits beyond which I could not and would not endure. If you think that I could look on and see *any one* treat you roughly or unkindly and hold my hand again!—why, I tell you, I could not do it, not to save my life."

"Nor mine?" she rejoined a little bitterly.

"You—you *have* some reason to fear?" he exclaimed in a low voice of suppressed passion. "By Heaven! I *can't* stand this! Asenath——"

She gave a start, but not at his calling her by her name, which he had never ventured to do before.

"Don't!" she murmured suddenly, with a hurry and urgency in her lowered tone which betrayed some apprehension. Her ear had caught a sound which Ray caught one instant later, the sound of Gervas Fitzallan's voice in the corridor. On the instinct of the moment she laid her hand lightly on Ray's arm with a clinging gesture of appeal, and shrank a shade nearer to him. She heard the step she knew so well, the quiet, almost stealthy, yet firm and regular footfall, coming from the corridor along the passage that led out on to the balcony. Ray heard her catch her breath, and thought in a second of the only thing that he could do for her sake.

"Don't be afraid," he breathed softly, bending close to her ear so that no one, however near them, could have heard his whisper. "I am gone; good-bye!" He lifted her hand to his lips; he felt the cold, slim fingers quiver, and he was gone indeed in a moment. They had been standing between the dark windows of Geoffrey's room and the adjoining one; the latter was closed, but Geoffrey's window was open. Ray stepped softly over the low sill, and was lost in the safe darkness of Geoffrey's room before Fitzallan emerged upon the balcony.

"Why, Asenath! you here? star-gazing all alone? I came up to look for you. I thought you were with Miss Eileen?"

"Yes, I have been in to see her," she replied; "and it was such a beautiful starlight night, I stepped out to look at it."

"Through the glass?" he rejoined. "You would see it better in the open air."

They moved away; and until they did so, Ray, afraid of knocking over chairs and tables in the darkness and thus drawing attention to his presence, had remained standing still in Geoffrey's room. As their voices died away down the passage, he moved across the room, stumbled against a chair, flung himself down in it, and sat still awhile trying to cool and calm himself—a process which was very necessary, for his heart was beating so violently he was sure any one in the room must have heard it. He liked the darkness better than the light just now; it seemed to soothe a little the maddening fever that throbbed in his veins—a fever as much of yearning tenderness, solicitude, gnawing anxiety for her sake, as of passion. She was afraid of that fellow, he was sure—of that brute whose hand he had seen grip her delicate arm until she nearly screamed with the pain. She might deny it, but she *was* afraid of him; he had heard her catch her breath, felt her hand quiver, and cling to his arm, as she recognized his step drawing near.

And the worst of it was that he knew too well she had only spoken the truth when she said Ray could not help her—could only do her cruel harm. Geoffrey had said the same, and they were both right. His hands were tied; he was helpless and powerless: arm, brain and heart all panting to render her loyal service, and all paralyzed—forbidden to move for her sake!

He perceived truly that Asenath, although she had denied it, was in her heart afraid of her husband—though perhaps not so much afraid as Ray's heated imagination pictured her. Her feeling of apprehension now sprang partly from the pricking of her own conscience, which constantly reproached her with the concealment and tacit deception she was practising—partly from something in Fitzallan's look, an indescribable gleam in his eye which she had caught now and then of late, which caused her an instinctive, unreasoning doubt and dread. Now, while Ray lingered, a prey to these troubled thoughts, in the darkness of Geoffrey's room, Dr. Fitzallan remarked to Asenath that as Eileen was still up, he would just go in and bid her good-night; and he did so, making a few ordinary inquiries about her health, and recommending her to go to bed very soon.

He pressed her hand kindly as he bade her "good-night and sleep well;" and as her soft, dark eyes looked up with their half-plaintive, wistful little smile in his face, a sort of triumph flashed through the not unkind, though masterful and almost stern, composure of his expression. It was not so much that he triumphed over this gentle, helpless creature's innocence, as in his own unscrupulousness. Others—even worse men than he—would have

recoiled from this seething of the kid in its mother's milk; but he exulted that *he* could do even this! Two days ago even he could scarcely have done this thing; but it seemed as if the destruction of his faith in his wife had destroyed all the humanity in his heart. He had been on the watch; he knew of her private meetings with Ray in the orangery this afternoon and on the balcony this evening; and this night of all nights there was no mercy, no relenting, to be looked for from him! Ray had not another word with Asenath that night; but he perceived by her manner that nothing unpleasant to her had occurred; and he rested easy in the reassuring belief that Fitzallan had no suspicion that she had not been alone on the balcony.

Fitzallan seemed in somewhat higher spirits—or, perhaps, it would be more correct to say, less cold and impassive than usual. He was readier to smile, and even to laugh aloud than was his wont. Kate and May were full of lively babble, and made him laugh out more than once before they parted for the night.

When Ray went up to his room at the usual time, he felt as if he should never be able to compose himself to sleep again. His head throbbed with crowding thoughts; a feeling of wild restlessness raged in him; he could no more sleep than if a physical fever, running to its height, had been burning in his veins. He did not think it even worth while lying down and trying to sleep, but stayed up thinking, as it was his habit to do when excited or troubled.

Never before had he realized so thoroughly the position into which this mad passion for Asenath Fitzallan was driving him, and, perchance, dragging *her*, too; that was worse. Never had he seen so clearly through the blinding, misleading mists of passion, that shut out the view of all beyond the hour, the precarious path he was treading, the dangers that beset it, dangers which he dreaded on her account far, far more than on his own. This night for the first time a faint glimmering light dawned upon him—a dim perception of the possibility that Asenath might not be wholly indifferent to him—that his love had perhaps even already touched her, if ever so lightly, and even unconsciously to herself. Frigid, repellant, harsh, angry, haughty, disdainful, *cruel* to him—all that she had been; but not indifferent. He began to realize now that her exceeding bitterness, the cutting taunts and reproaches, with which she had lashed him, alternated with her occasional gentleness to him, did not mean indifference. Without those interludes of soft friendliness, they might have meant hatred; but taken with the context of that intermittent softness, they did not spell hatred any more than they did indifference.

Now he recalled her gentle, almost tender, care of him whilst he was ill and wounded on board the "Sicilian;" remembered how, when the ship was in danger, she had come in search of him, lest he should be left alone to drown like a rat in a trap; how she had

clung to him when the great wave surged and broke over their heads, and for a moment both imagined they had drawn their last free breath. And this evening had she not admitted by implication that in keeping the secret of his reckless and reprehensible conduct in that selfish pursuit of her, which had so cruelly wronged her, she had thought of him as well as of herself.

"Not only for my own sake."

And had she not instinctively drawn nearer to his side, laid her hand on his arm, when Fitzallan's approaching step startled her?

Was it, then, possible that the faithful passion of his love might in time win some return from her? and if he believed this, was it not base of him to try to win it? Even now that the dream of her love had entered into his heart, Ray would as soon have cut off his right hand as have allowed himself to harbour a thought of dishonour to Asenath, or contemplated dragging her, the pure star of his life, down from the heaven in which she always seemed to move serenely above him. He never went beyond the thought of the possibility that the barrier of ice, which he had hitherto deemed shut and sealed her heart against love, might melt for him. Yet dared he dream of this?

To love her only hurt himself; to win her love would be a wrong to her. He knew her well enough to feel that if ever, even in the depths of her secret heart, she should yield to a forbidden love, it would turn her life to anguish; she would struggle almost to the death to hide, to stifle, to crush it. *Now* he suffered alone. Would he not be a villain to seek to make her suffer too?

Brought up in the purest, happiest, healthiest of English homes, where marriage was held alike as the most sacred, most blessed and blissful of institutions, all the influences of his training and education bore on him now, and made him recoil from contemplating the future if he should indeed ever succeed in winning Asenath to love him as he loved her; or, in other words, succeed in making her share in the pain which now he suffered alone! And yet his love fought a desperate fight with those early influences—scattered their forces right and left with the old, old argument that "Love is its own sanctification!" the old, old war-cry, "The world well lost!"

He adored and revered Asenath as well as loved her. She was his ideal of purity—his one fair star of perfect womanhood! Would he not be culpable, criminal, were he to seek to inflict upon her the anguish of an unsanctioned love, even though it might be hidden, unseen and unknown, in the inmost recesses of her own heart; to torture *her* with "the weariness, the fever, and the fret" of an unceasing struggle against herself—as he knew she *would* struggle, if she died in the conflict! And yet—he loved her so passionately—could he give up the hope, the dream of knowing—if only for one wild moment of delirious, hopeless rapture—that *she* loved him?

The battle raged in his soul; he lived over and over again his interviews with her. Mad hopes and wild regrets and remorseful self-reproaches wrestled in him with forces that seemed equally matched.

He sat by the dying fire till it was a heap of pale, smouldering embers. It was cold in these dead, silent hours of the night; but he was glad to be cold; he only wished vainly that physical discomfort would distract and divide his consciousness with mental disturbance.

Meanwhile, although he did not know it, for one hour of the night another watcher, like him, was waking, but unlike him, was keeping vigil with an object. While Asenath slept, her husband woke, and watched.

The windows of their room in the West Pavilion looked directly on to the balcony with which the Percivals' rooms communicated, and were but a short distance from it. The light in the Fitzallans' room was dim, only just sufficient to give all the objects in the room a shadowy shape; but outside the moon was clear and bright, a pale golden orb in the frosty purple sky. As Gervas Fitzallan softly raised the blind, a wave of moonlight washed in, and reached as far as Asenath's face; and she stirred in her sleep. He did not wish her to wake and find him watching; he let the blind lower, leaving only a narrow aperture through which he could look out. He counted the windows of the rooms opposite him, in the main building. He could distinguish their outlines only imperfectly through the glass walls of the closed-in balcony; but, aided by the moonlight, he could trace and locate the different rooms. He could distinguish which was Ray's window, Eileen's window, Geoffrey's window. He could see that there was a pale glow of light in the first, and fainter beams in the other two. He looked at his watch in the moonlight.

"The short—short hour would soon be past!"

This night's was a daring and desperate casting of the die. The game he was playing was a rash one. If it failed, he was destroyed. If by any chance the slightest indication pointed to his instrumentality, he swayed on the brink of a fatal precipice. He thought he had guarded well, that even in the event of failure he was safe. Even if Eileen's hand should be traced in this matter, somnambulism would be the probable interpretation placed upon it, and the girl herself, on waking, would be perfectly incapable of giving any clue to the cause of her actions in sleep. Yet he realized that he stood on the dizzy verge of deadly ruin and disaster; and one thing he resolved, that if he fell he would not fall alone! He would not leave his wife behind, secure and safe, to be sheltered in the arms of another love—while he went down into those black, bottomless depths!

Presently his watchful eyes detected a movement, a brighter light, a flitting shadow at the window of Eileen's room; a moment more, and a slight white figure appeared on the balcony; it glided, like a pallid beam of moving light, along towards Geoffrey's room, and there for a minute blotted the pale faint "glimmering square" of his window, and disappeared. He waited, watched; the moments seemed hours. Had anything gone wrong? Had she been startled—awakened? It was far from the time for Geoffrey's return; his train was not yet nearly due. *That* could not be the cause of failure! Would that fragile white figure never return? Long as it appeared to him, it was but a brief few minutes in reality, before the pale faintly-outlined form reappeared and glided back like a flitting dream—along the balcony to her own window.

Now there was no more need to watch! For him there was nothing more to do but to possess his soul in patience till the morning. If anything had gone wrong he would know it then. And if, in spite of his precautions, his scheme had failed——? He looked at Asenath. In the dim light he could see that her sleeping face looked pure and fair, and pale and calm. No! he would never leave her to another! Her love that man might have basely stolen; herself he should never have!

As he looked at her she stirred, sighed, and awoke. He had a vague feeling that something in his face would alarm her—arouse her suspicions; and, as she moved, with one quick step and gesture he turned out the light, that she should not look into his eyes—for it seemed to him as if some lurid flame leapt up from his soul and glared out of them!

Asenath completely woke up just in time to be conscious that he was putting out the light; and it startled her unnaturally for so slight and simple a thing. He always moved quietly, but it seemed to her now that never was human footstep so slow and stealthy as his! She was not generally fanciful: but a curious, unreasonable dread seized her now, of the darkness, of his silent presence—it seemed to be creeping towards her amongst the shadows as a tiger steals through the darkness of the jungle. She was, as a rule, far from susceptible to occult impressions. Even her vague, intuitive recognition of the latent evil in her husband's nature had been too faint and misty to be formulated even in a thought—rather an instinct than a perception. But now her nerves must have been in an abnormally excited and sensitive condition; perhaps the air was heavy-laden with subtle influences she could not but feel! Perhaps Ray's evident anxiety on her behalf had impressed her; and then for the last day or two she had caught an occasional glint in her husband's eyes which made her unaccountably uneasy. Now strange and horrible fancies came into her mind. Was there a pale gleam of something like cold steel in his hand? Were his fingers creeping towards her throat?

Then she thought how very foolish and fanciful she was! She

could not conceive why such grim fancies should occur to her. Why should Gervas wish to hurt or frighten her? In the daylight she would laugh at these absurd, whimsical terrors—so new and strange, so unnatural to *her*! And yet she felt as if there were some tragedy in the air; and although with a reaction of her usual quiet common sense, she presently succeeded in calming herself to sleep again, even when she slept her dreams were full of shadowy trouble; and from that hour the fear of her husband—an inexplicable secret shrinking of physical dread—never left her—until the last!

Eileen, unconscious and innocent, slept a deep and dreamless sleep; Ray sat by the dying embers of his fire and thought of Asenath, who, although he did not know it, lay dreaming of him—of him and trouble and terror. He had no idea how long he had sat there, before at last he heard the noise of doors opening and shutting downstairs, and footsteps coming up, and knew that it must be three o'clock, and Geoffrey must have returned—Geoffrey, subduing his usually rather heavy tread with painstaking care and consideration, so as not to disturb the repose of the slumbering household. Then he heard Geoffrey's door at the end of the corridor quietly open and shut. He did not go out to greet Geoffrey; he was in no mood for talking, and, besides, it was too late to be moving about and disturbing sleeping people just for a brief good-night chat. He sat still and thought how chilly the night had grown. Presently he heard a door flung suddenly open. It sounded by the direction like the door of Geoffrey's room. By the noise, it was opened roughly—violently. Ray looked up a little startled, as one is apt to be at the slightest unexpected noise in the dead of night. Then he heard, or fancied he heard, another sound, a low, scarcely audible sound, but which sent a thrill of indescribable uneasiness like a chill through his veins. What was it? Not a stifled cry; not a groan! A sound like some one gasping, struggling for breath? Ray rushed to his door, threw it open and looked down the corridor towards Geoffrey's room. By the light of the one gas-jet which had been left burning, he saw that Geoffrey's door was open, and just outside it two men—were they struggling? No; the one was striving to support the other in his arms. It was Geoffrey! Geoff was ill, or hurt somehow, and was leaning for support on the night-porter or watchman, whose duty it was to patrol the place.

Ray hastened down the corridor; but quickly as he went, before he reached the spot, the watchman, unable to hold Geoffrey up, had let down his heavy weight as gently as possible on the floor, and was stooping over him. As Ray came up with them, the man gave an exclamation of terror. Then, looking round and seeing Ray:

"Mr. Carresford's dying, sir!" he cried. "I'll knock up Dr. Treherne!" He rushed along the corridor towards Dr. Treherne's room, while Ray threw himself down on his knees beside Geoffrey.

The first glance at Geoffrey's ghastly face told him the man had spoken too truly. The dying man's unnaturally dilated eyes stared wildly up at Ray without recognition. His collar was torn open; his hands clutching convulsively at his breast.

"Geoffrey—Geoff!" Ray exclaimed, horror-stricken, and in a voice hoarse with emotion, trying to raise him up from the floor. But Geoffrey was past speech or sign.

One moment's last choking struggle for breath, and he lay dead in Ray's arms.

He heard the night-porter calling at Dr. Treherne's door an entreaty for the doctor to come quickly, for Mr. Carresford was dying in a fit. He heard in a moment more another door open, and a low but alarmed voice—his mother's—in inquiry; anxious, though vague, as there was no one that she could see in that first glance near her to inquire of:

"What is it? Anything the matter?"

Ray was incapable of speech for the moment. He was pressing his hand on Geoffrey's heart, seeking in vain for the faintest quiver; all in vain, as he knew too well. Mrs. Percival looked in that direction, and saw her son kneeling, bending over her brother's prostrate form, and with a low cry she darted down the corridor.

"Mother—mother," said Ray, throwing his arm round her, partly to restrain and partly to support her, "it's all over with him; but for God's sake keep quiet. Think of that poor girl—May!"

The watchman came back from Dr. Treherne's room.

"Is he gone, poor gentleman?" he said compassionately.

"Ah! I saw he was a-going fast. The doctor's coming."

Other doors were opening now, as other sleepers were aroused, and presently amongst other inquiring voices they heard the voice of Lady May. Mrs. Percival, never forgetful of others even in the sudden shock of her own grief, turned and rushed to meet Geoffrey's betrothed, who was coming along the corridor in a hasty *deshabille*, her hair hanging about her shoulders.

"May, dear," cried Mrs. Percival, catching her in her arms, "wait; don't come this minute; Geoffrey is—is very ill."

May struggled from her embrace and flew to her lover's side. Ray had sometimes wondered whether May, whom he regarded as a pretty coquette of the butterfly order of women, had much heart. He did not doubt it after he had heard the piercing cry which told she *had* a heart—to love—and break.

Mrs. Percival, sobbing herself, strove to soothe the stricken bride-elect, for whom there was no comfort, no solace, that this earth could give. Dr. Treherne and Ray endeavoured to get the two women away from the body; other members of the household came crowding round.

In the confusion no one noticed a slim white figure that slipped silently as a ghost among them—a little shivering figure that

swayed with faltering steps and sank down by Geoffrey's side. Eileen was gazing into the altered face, clasping the cold and stiffening hands; and while Ray and his mother fairly carried the unhappy betrothed away, Eileen, without a cry, without a word, a sob, fell forward insensible across the dead man's breast.

*(To be continued.)*

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## DICK'S LITTLE WIFE'S SECRET.

By J. SALE LLOYD,

AUTHOR OF "SHADOWS OF THE PAST," "WE COSTELIONS," "RUTH EVERINGHAM," "THE SILENT SHADOW," "SCAMP," ETC., ETC.

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PEOPLE always said that Jack Ansell had "the devil's luck and his own," and when he married the fascinating little widow of the Midlands every one was quite sure of it.

Lady Lowrie might have wedded any one, and had many admirers, but she had tried marrying for money and position once and had found it a failure so far as happiness was concerned, but it must not be supposed that so delightful a little person could act in such a worldly manner as these words might indicate.

It was in fact quite the other way. Pretty Rose Flemming, being fancy free, consented to save her father's credit by the sacrifice of herself.

She was told what was required of her, and did it quietly and without complaint, and being requested to ask no questions, she was silent, a feeling of sad certainty creeping about her young heart that only some dire need would have induced her doting father to sell her in this slavish fashion.

Sir John Lowrie did not prove a good or a pleasant husband, but his money and position were undoubted, and beautiful Lady Lowrie became the fashion both in town and country. In one thing he behaved handsomely; nay, in two.

He did not bother her very long with his company, and when he died, he left her provided for in a queenly fashion.

Even her widow's weeds, which it must be admitted were remarkably becoming to her, could not keep her admirers away. Cupid could whisper in crape mourning as well as in colours.

"Rose," said Colonel Flemming, when she had worn her sable garments for a year without any mitigation, "you have been a good and noble daughter, and I hope your dutiful conduct has brought its reward to you. Your first marriage was for *my* sake. Your second—well, my dear, you may certainly pick and choose for yourself this time."

A faint blush flickered over her cheek. "If ever I marry again it will be for love, father," she whispered. And another year having passed by, she chose the poorest of all her lovers. Daring, good looking, laughter-loving Jack Ansell, the younger son of

the ancient squire, who had lived his life at the Manor House contentedly, and found it difficult to understand why his two sons were so totally unlike him, and required so much outside the pleasures of the Manor Farm, which was his own chief hobby, and had proved nearly as expensive a one as his son's less mild excitements.

Dick, his father's heir, did not find England large enough for him, so started for Australia at an early age. What he did there for a living was very various indeed.

His letters were full of tales of wild adventures, sometimes he made money, but then followed the spending ——— so that he really was never much the better off for it.

However, wherever he went, Dick Ansell was a thorough favourite both with men and women.

Jack panted to join him, but the mention of such an idea so upset the old squire that his kind-hearted son spoke of it no more, and gave himself up to the enjoyments of the hunting field, where he for the first time saw young Lady Lowrie, who from that day forward was his ideal woman.

Just three years from that date he ventured to tell her of the love which had been in his heart for her so long—and there was such a glad light in her soft dark eyes that he needed no further reply to his words.

Colonel and Mrs. Flemming approved of her choice. They liked Jack Ansell, and believed in the goodness of his heart, notwithstanding his somewhat wild ways. The old squire was charmed with his son's future wife, and on account of his feeble health urged on the marriage.

Lindenthorpe Towers had been a favourite resort even in the lifetime of Sir John Lowrie, who had seen his best days; but under the reign of Jack and his wife it was just the perfection of a house to either stay at, or pop in and out at your will.

Rose would have nothing to do with retaining her title of "Lady," as many widows do when they wed a man of lower rank.

"If Jack is good enough for me so is his name, father," she laughed, when the Colonel suggested it to her; so he said no more, and the compliment was appreciated by Jack Ansell.

The squire had been right concerning the shortness of his life.

He joined the great majority, and both Jack and the family solicitors wrote to Dick to come home and take possession of his inheritance, but he seemed in no hurry whatever to do so, and Jack and his wife had been two years happily married before the incidents here to be related, took place.

It was Christmas-tide—a real old-fashioned one—with King Frost's reign in full swing.

Never had the bright dark green holly trees seemed so full of red berries. Never had the robins been so tame. The ground

was as white as a bridecake. Nature's great jeweller had been at his flagree work, weaving the unsightly spiders' webs into maps of fairyland wrought in silver.

He had also laid his hand upon all nature, and touched it with an artist's cunning brush not to be equalled.

Evening was coming on ; the stars began to glint like bayonet points overhead.

Mrs. Ansell stood looking out of the window when her husband burst into the room.

"Little woman," he cried, "I have a surprise for you," and he slipped his arm around his wife's trim waist.

"A pleasant one, I hope, Jack," she answered, smiling up at him in the gloaming.

"Very pleasant to me, small wife."

"Oh! I shall like it too, then," she said with growing interest.

"What is it, dear?"

"Dick will be here to-night! I have had a telegram from him. He will be just in time for Christmas, and he will keep us all alive I can tell you. I hope he won't frighten you with his unconventional ways, Rose. When he sees what a pretty sister-in-law he has he will make you pay toll at once."

"And you will not mind, Jack?"

"What! Mind old Dick! Not if I know it," replied he heartily. "He is the best and most open, honest fellow alive. He was always in scrapes at school for every one's faults as well as his own, and he never would split on any of the real culprits. He would laughingly remark that his 'shoulders were broad and his hide thick,' and that it 'would fall lightly on him.'"

"Is he a very fine man, Jack?"

"Yes; if he has not grown smaller."

"And handsome?"

"He used to be. Such a pair of laughing blue eyes! The girls all smiled as soon as he looked at them."

"Fair! and Flora is dark, like me! I wonder if your brother and my sister will take to each other? It would be rather nice if they did, Jack, wouldn't it?"

"Now you mention it, he is sure to take her by storm. She is just his style, and mine, too, for she is extremely like you."

"Perhaps it is lucky for me, dear, that Flora did not return from France sooner," said the young wife, wickedly.

"Now, look here, Rose," retorted her husband, folding his arms about her, "your punishment will be very severe if you talk like that."

"I am not *very* much afraid," she laughed. "I rather like the way *you* punish me, Jack; but now, I want to know, shall we help Dick and Flo' to be happy?"

"You little match-maker! What, before they have even met? Let them alone, Rose; that is the surest sort of match-making."

"It is not the surest way with Flo'. *Opposition*, my dear boy, is the safe road with her! We have said so much about your brother, that she is sure to be perverse and pretend she does not like him, so do not let us tell her that he is coming at all. We shall have to take him into our confidence, of course—and one or two of the girls also—plump, good-natured Miss Godfrey now will do anything for any one. I shall be obliged to double her up with Flora, as we have every bed occupied; they *get on*, so they will not mind."

"That is settled, then, Rosie, and none too soon; listen, here come the decorators back from the church. What a bright, clear voice your sister has, and—why, the curate is walking with her. Church decorations have a great deal to answer for—eh, Rose? Perhaps Dick is too late."

"No, no. Flo' cannot have such bad taste as that!"

"*No opposition, mind*, my dear; I really couldn't stand Marley for a brother-in-law! that is the nearest I can arrive at the relationship. I shall praise him effusively when Flo' and I meet." And so he did—raising up a strong adverse opinion in the mind of pretty, contrary Flora Flemming.

There was a very merry crew assembled that night according to custom in Mrs. Jack Ansell's dressing room. Just a dozen pretty girls, including the hostess herself, all in their dainty dressing gowns and slippers, brushing and combing their long hair like a bevy of mermaids.

Mrs. Ansell was such a dear, and entered into all their fun with such kindness and good humour, that all their jokes were brought to her room at night, where they were told and discussed before the ladies parted—and most of the girls enjoyed this free and easy hour as much or more than any of the day—sipping hot chocolate by the fire, nibbling macaroons, and talking over their own love affairs as well as those of their neighbours.

Polly Godfrey whispered to Flora that she had a bad head-ache coming on, and would slip quietly away so as not to break up the party by the fire, adding, "But we shall meet again, dear, as we are to sleep together to-night—you promised—did you not? Mrs. Ansell told me so."

"Oh, yes! Rose mentioned that we must double up to make room for some mysterious stranger. Au revoir, Polly. I shall not be long."

But notwithstanding that assurance, the girls *were* very long.

The carol singers came under the window with the sweet message of peace and good will.

Then Jack Ansell's voice was heard at the door asking for his wife, and she ran out to him, and after a whispered conference they went away together, her beautiful waving dark hair reaching nearly to the ground, in full relief against the dressing gown of crimson plush trimmed with soft grey fur.

Jack drew his wife's small hand through his arm, and led her to the dining room with a bright and happy face, having left his gentlemen friends to amuse themselves in the billiard room.

"Here she is, Dick; I have brought her down notwithstanding her remonstrances about her hair. I tell her it is prettier loose, and so it is. Come, old boy, what do you think of your sister? you have not seen anything like *that* among our Kangaroo cousins, now, have you?" and he turned his wife round so that the light fell full upon her beautiful face.

Dick jumped to his feet, and advanced towards her with extended hands.

She looked up at him in some surprise, he was such a splendid fellow, taller and handsomer even than her own Jack.

"By Jove! You're a lucky dog, Jack! I envy you, I really do. Don't forget that I have a brother's privilege, Rose, and in the present instance I am not likely to let it pass, for I highly approve of Jack's choice," and without more ado he kissed her affectionately. Nor did she seem to disapprove at all. She had taken a real liking for this great brother of hers, with his merry blue eyes, and genial ways, even though they were more open and free than those of brothers-in-law in general. And the three sat so long chattering that Mrs. Ansell forgot all about her lady friends, to whom she had not said good-night, and when she came upstairs she went straight to bed, leaving her husband to show Dick to his room, and break up the party of smokers, most of whom had, however, dispersed.

Richard Ansell for once was tired, and loitered but little beside the fine fire which was burning in the broad old-fashioned grate. The comfort of the bed soon drew him to sleep, and he turned from the flickering fire flames for greater darkness.

How long he remained asleep he never knew, but he awoke suddenly, wondering whether he could possibly be in his right senses or no.

He had certainly understood that he was to sleep alone, yet it appeared he was to share his room with some one else, for without doubt some living and moving, and *shivering* creature was getting into his bed, and as he was lying directly in the centre, seemed to find it a difficult process.

"Oh! *do* move, you great fat thing," laughed a bright silvery voice; "you have all the room, and I want a lot, for I'm *so* cold I am coming to bed in my dressing gown," and two small hands gave him a decided push as their owner crept up very close to him.

Dick Ansell was in a fix, and for the life of him he did not know how to get out of it.

His sense of the ridiculous was greatly tickled. Who on earth did the girl think he was, to call him a *great fat thing*, and what would happen when she found out her mistake?

A girl the interloper certainly was, for not only was she a slender little creature, with a bell-like voice, but she confessed to going to bed in a dressing gown, and he was getting tangled in a wealth of long hair.

He moved his hand which was covered with it and she squealed.

"You wretch, Polly; do wake up and make room for me, you are pulling my hair so."

Dick sat up.

He *must* see who this nocturnal visitor was. There was something in the touch of the soft hands and the contact of those luxurious tresses which made his heart go at a very unusual pace, and filled him with a wild desire to see the face of the owner of the silvery voice.

The fire had not gone out, but it was giving very little light indeed.

He leaned forward to try and obtain a slight idea of the face on the pillow, and the girl moved uneasily.

The coals suddenly fell in, and the light of the fire flickered full upon the face of Dick Ansell, and his accidental visitor saw before her a pair of laughing blue eyes, filled with a strange light, a fair curly head, and a long moustache.

There was time for nothing more.

The flames died out as suddenly as they had sprung up, and the room was in darkness once more.

Dick had not had his wish wholly fulfilled.

He had for that moment seen a dark little head nestled upon the pillow, but the fire flames were behind it, and the features were but dimly visible.

With a startled cry the girl darted from the bed, and tumbled over a chair.

He could hear her frantically patting about seeking an exit, and in her haste she struck herself again and again.

"Oh! what *shall* I do? What *shall* I do?" she moaned.

Of course he ought to have put his head under the clothes and let her alone; but no man is wise at all hours, and Dick Ansell never was famed for much forethought.

He sprang out of bed and ran to her rescue, and finding herself pursued she began to scream.

"Hush! you dear little thing, be quiet; you will raise the house," he murmured. "Come, trust me. I know you have made a mistake, but never mind; we can keep the secret now, but not if you make such a noise. If people once begin to ask questions, why, there would be nothing left but to tell them all, and perhaps you wouldn't like that; they would make a fine joke of it, no doubt."

He had overtaken the girl, who was, as doubtless the reader has guessed, no other than Flora Flemming, and to prevent her running further, he placed his arm about her.

This more than ever scared poor Flora, who plunged frantically to get away from him.

"One kiss, sweetheart, and I will let you out," whispered Dick, as, stooping to speak to her, his cheek touched her soft face, and sent an electric thrill pleasantly through his whole being.

"I know you are a little darling, and we shall be the best of friends, by and by. You need not be afraid of me, not in the least. I am not a bad old chap. Ask my brother Jack if I am; but a kiss I must have. I have set my mind upon it."

So apparently had *not* Flora Flemming! She fought like a little tiger cat, and another flickering flame struggling to life in the dying fire, lit her way to the door, through which she fled like a gust of north wind, with a parting wail, leaving in Dick's detaining hand a big piece of white lace from the sleeve of her dressing gown.

He looked down the corridor at the figure fluttering away in the distance, and saw it plainly in the white moonlight until it vanished into one of the doors, which was quietly closed after her, and he felt sure that he heard the key turn in the lock.

He shut his own door and stood in the darkness considering.

He was disappointed, for he never gained that kiss, after all! Nor had he really seen Flora's face. He had told her who he was, but she had not enlightened him in the least. His only clue was the torn piece of lace in his hand.

He struck a wax vesta, and, lighting his candle, gazed at the relic of his past fray with the unknown girl, to whom his vagrant fancy had turned so decidedly.

And by the light of his candle he saw that he had two other clues.

A tiny pair of warm fur slippers stood beside the bed, and there were the stains of blood upon the front of his nightshirt.

"Poor little girl, she must have scratched herself upon that beastly pin I stuck in last night for want of a button. I am sorry, and yet it will certainly tell me who she is, and so, for my own sake, I am glad. If that little girl will be my wife I will settle down as quiet as a lamb at the old Manor House and be a respectable member of society. No more wanderings, Master Dick, if you can jog along the road of life with a sweet voiced, soft little woman like that. Her cheek was as sleek as satin, and, by Jove, she can have no lack of constitution either—she was as strong as she was small. If only I had seen her face! But it *cannot* be anything but pretty. Yes, I am certain she is a beauty—a brunette, too, if I mistake not—with hair as luxuriant as that of Jack's wife.

"I wonder what *she* would say if she were to hear this funny little story;" and picking up the slippers, he placed them in the palm of his hand.

"What mites of things they are," he murmured foolishly, and kissed them.

And now for what Mrs. Jack did say.

When she went to her dressing room the following morning, she found Flora rolled up asleep upon her sofa in an eiderdown quilt, and some one tapping at the closed door. Upon opening it she was apologised to for the fire not being alight, by her maid, who explained that she had knocked several times and could not get in.

Mrs. Jack Ansell placed her finger upon her lips to induce silence, and pointed to the sleeping girl; but as soon as her servant was gone she went to her sister's side and awoke her.

"Why, Flora, dear, did you not like sleeping with Mary Godfrey?" she asked, in surprise.

Flora Flemming started up.

"Oh! Rose, Rose, I have done such a dreadful thing," she cried, tears welling into her soft, dark eyes. "I *didn't* go to Polly's room. I misunderstood you, I suppose. I thought she was coming to mine, and—and—there! I *must* tell you. I undressed here and left all my things in your room, because Polly had a headache, and I thought I would not take a light into my room—and—and——"

"Well!" said Mrs. Jack interrogatively.

"I—I—got into bed with a man," and Flora burst into a passion of tears.

"Did *what*?" cried Rose Ansell quite hysterically; "nonsense, Flo'; you dreamt it."

"No," replied the girl; "it is only too terribly true—and oh! Rose, he tried to kiss me—I shall die of shame, I shall indeed—I must leave the house, I would *never* meet Dick Ansell after—after—last night," and the sobs came thicker and faster.

Mrs. Ansell grew serious.

She perfectly understood how to manage her sister.

"I *quite* enter into your feelings, Flo', dear," she said, as she kissed her sympathetically; "but how do you know this rude rough fellow is my Jack's brother? he couldn't be—Jack would never do such a thing."

"But he *is*, Rose—he told me so."

"What impudence! to let you know who he was too, after going into your room like that. Jack will *never* forgive him, in fact I don't think he will even let him remain in the house, which will be much more satisfactory than *your* going away, dear girl—Yes! I must tell Jack of his conduct, and ask him to make it clear that he must leave here," and Mrs. Jack looked very grave and firm indeed. Flora's sobs had ceased; she was regarding her almond-shaped finger nails in a very reflective fashion.

Suddenly she looked up.

"Oh! Rose, please, *please don't tell any one*—not even Jack. I couldn't live through it, indeed I couldn't."

"How can I help it, my dear?—you *can't* meet Dick after what

has happened. He must go away." There was a very long pause—then Flora spoke again.

"If only you would stand by me and help me, Rose," she said.

"Can you point out the way?" asked Mrs. Jack, too wise to make the faintest suggestion.

"Yes! I think I could. I—I don't think Mr. Ansell will mention it. I don't indeed. He said we could keep the secret."

"A nice sort of young man, certainly," grumbled Mrs. Jack.

"Well, do you know, I think it *was* nice of him, Rose; some men would have made a fine joke of it to their friends—and it was too dark to see my face—I really don't think it possible that Mr. Ansell *could* know me again. I don't indeed. If we take *no notice*, he will probably think it was one of the servants." She walked over to a mirror as she spoke. "Was it not a providential thing, Rose, that I left all my clothes in here? Every one's slippers are very much alike, and that is all the clue I have left behind—unless—unless I left any marks on him when I scratched my face against him somewhere. I wonder whether *that* scratch could betray me?"

"Of course it could—see, you have stained your dressing gown."

"Then I will not meet him," said Flora decidedly. "I will go home at once."

"And deliberately tell him what you wish to conceal! No, he knows you are here, he was told so last night. Your absence would be certain proof. You must remain, and we must help you." And she walked to a drawer and brought out from it a packet of black court plaster—and deliberately cut out twelve round patches all alike—and fastening one to her own cheek, she proceeded to cover the scratch upon her sister's with the second.

Then she gave Flora a kiss, and bade her cheer up, for every girl at the breakfast table should wear a black patch as well as herself!

"Rose! you *are* a dear! what a sharp idea of yours—and you will let the girls think it just a joke."

"Of course I will. My dear Flora, was I born yesterday? I will do my best to help you—nevertheless, I am very angry with Dick, very angry indeed."

"Don't be unjust to him, Rose," whispered Flora, "the mistake was mine, you know, not his."

"If you are satisfied, it is no business of mine, Flo'," replied the little woman, turning away to hide the smile which *would* rise to her lips; "in your place I would tell Jack and have him sent away."

Which quite decided Flora upon the subject!

Dick Ansell couldn't sleep a wink. A clear girlish voice was ringing in his ears—calling him "a great fat thing." He could still feel the shivering little woman creeping close to him, and

her strong little hands pushing him away to make more room for herself.

He got up directly the day broke, and having locked up the slippers and piece of lace, he went down to the breakfast room with a strongly beating heart.

He would now learn who his nocturnal visitor had been.

Mrs. Jack never kept any secrets from her husband, therefore she found time to tell him Flora's very funny little story before they went down to breakfast, and it so amused Jack that he could not leave off laughing at all. When the husband and wife entered the room, there Dick Ansell was before them, looking eager and excited.

"Hallo, Dick, never knew you were up so early! What's in the wind?" asked Jack, wickedly.

"Nothing," replied Dick, with a warm glow showing up through his fair skin. Then he turned to his sister-in-law. "Why, Rose! Are *patches* the fashion in the old country now?" And before she could answer, Jack had replied for her, with his eyes turned full upon his brother, and he was evidently enjoying his confusion.

"Not a bit of it. Rose does not follow silly fashions—perhaps she has *scratched* her face somehow!—it is the first time I have seen the plaster."

"Scratched her face," repeated Dick, uneasily, while his colour deepened still more.

*Surely* his sister-in-law had not mistaken his room for hers the night before!

He gazed at her, but she appeared to be quite at her ease.

"No," he decided, "it was quite impossible!"

The guests came into the room one by one, and to Dick's astonishment and dismay, each girl wore a black patch like Mrs. Jack Ansell, and, like her, each one looked superbly unconscious of anything the least awkward when introduced by their hostess to her brother Dick.

He watched every face with interest, followed by disappointment.

In all that bevy of pretty girls there was no such face as he had hoped to see—no such face as he had pictured through the night—not one of those before him would he care to ask to take up her place at the old Manor House as his life companion!

"I think we have all turned up," said Jack, cheerily. "So we may as well fall to."

Dick's eyes were wandering towards the door hoping that his ideal might yet enter, but his brother's words dashed his spirits, although his sister-in-law's gentle voice rekindled the torch of hope almost as soon as it was extinguished.

"All except Flora," she said; "she slept in my dressing room last night—perhaps she needs calling; I'll run up and fetch her."

It was fortunate she went.

Upon the stairs was Flora, as white as a sheet.

"I *can't* come in, Rose," she whispered faintly—but Mrs. Jack just drew her hand through her arm, and led her in.

"Dick Ansell, my sister, Flora Flemming," rang out her fresh clear voice. "I think you two alone are strangers now. Oh! there is a vacant place beside you, Dick. Flora can sit there and make your better acquaintance," and she slipped away to her rightful position at the head of the table.

Dick caught eagerly at the hesitating little hand which poor confused Flora having half extended, was ready to take away again.

Yes, it was the same soft white hand he felt sure enough, and he glanced at the changeful face, upon which the roses bloomed and faded with strange swiftness.

The wealth of dark hair was coiled now about the little head. Where was the mark of that cruel pin?

Another black piece of plaster!

Dick Ansell smiled.

He began to see the joke at last.

"Patches are the fashion now in England, I suppose, Miss Flemming," he said, as demurely as he could, and there was no mistaking the voice which shyly answered him.

All Dick's sense of disappointment was over. This lovely little woman by his side was everything he could desire, and before breakfast was over he had in his mind's eye refurnished the old Manor House for her reception, and he found that he was actually and really in love at last, and willing to give up his freedom.

Dick never referred to that mistake of Flora's until he felt that he had gained her regard.

Some time after, he asked her to go and look at the old Manor House with him, and when they were standing in the fine, quaint drawing room, he placed his arms about her and looked down into the soft brown eyes, so like those of Jack's wife.

"Little Flora," he said tenderly, "could you advise me how to refurnish this old place so as to suit a lady?"

"Just let it alone, it is perfect," she answered. "Money cannot purchase these lights and shades, mellow tints and old-world furniture."

"Then it shall remain as it is. Flora, can you recommend me a wife who would share it with me? I know I am a rough sort of old fellow after all my wanderings; but, little one, I *had* a heart, and now I have none. One night a little creature crept into my room and stole it away in the darkness, without giving me a glimpse of her dear sweet face, and she has kept it ever since. Flora darling, I cannot tell you how I love you; you are

just the dearest small woman in the world, and Jack's wife is the next. You will make me happy, Flo', will you not? I cannot live without you now—indeed I cannot."

The beautiful face flushed painfully.

"Oh! Dick," she whispered, "I am so very, very much ashamed. What *must* you have thought of me?"

"Well, you were *not polite*, mignonne, I must confess," he laughed. "Fancy your calling me a *great fat thing*!"

"You will never tell anyone, Dick," she whispered as she clung to him.

"I will keep my little wife's secret, and she must keep mine. You will not refuse to kiss me now, darling; I have waited so long," and a pair of red lips were raised with love's confidence to his.

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## TRYSTING-TIME.

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'Tis only when the wooing west  
Has drawn the tired sun to her breast,  
I seek my darling's place of rest.

In twilight-time we used to meet—  
Ah me, how lag our listless feet  
When we have but a grave to greet!

And yet, this daisy dappl'd grave,  
So like a soft white-crested wave,  
Is all beneath the skies I have.

On broken wings the years have flown,  
O, love, since in the long ago  
I left you sleeping here alone!

M. HEDDERWICK BROWNE.

## A WOMAN'S HEART.

By MRS. ALEXANDER,

AUTHOR OF "THE WOOING O'T," "BY WOMAN'S WIT," "A LIFE INTEREST,"  
"A FALSE SCENT," ETC., ETC.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### A CHOICE OF EVILS.

A MUD-BESPATTERED hansom turned rapidly into one of those few remaining green-lane-like old streets behind Kensington Gore which have not yet been improved off the face of the earth, one wet October morning, and stopped at the gate of a semi-detached villa. By no means a prosperous-looking villa. The plaster had fallen in patches from the wall, and the railings sorely needed a coat of paint.

From the cab descended a gentleman whose figure looked young and active, though his face was grave, almost careworn. His long straight-cut coat, soft wide-brimmed hat and white neck-band indicated the High Church parson. After a brief tussle with the gate, which, owing to an inequality in the low walls at either side, was difficult to open, he succeeded in reaching the door, where he rapped energetically, producing a sharp, spiteful reverberation suggestive of thin walls and narrow space.

Some minutes elapsed before it was cautiously half-opened by an extremely youthful servant with a smutty face and an apron to match.

"Is Mrs. Repton at home?" asked the clergyman.

"I'm not sure, but I'll see," returned the girl.

"Pray give her my card," taking out his case and extracting one.

Half-closing the door, she retreated, but came back quickly, with an invitation to enter.

"In a moment," he said, and proceeded to pay the driver and dismiss the vehicle.

"Please walk in, sir," said the little slavey, opening the door of a fairly sized sitting-room, which looked out upon a damp and weedy garden. "I'll light a bit of fire in a minute."

"Not for me ; I shall be gone before it could burn up," replied the visitor in rather measured tones and with a pleasant refined voice. "Pray do not take the trouble."

The servant hesitated, and finally left the room, which the visitor began to pace slowly, thoughtfully. He was pale and thin, but tall and well made ; his light brown hair curled rebelliously in spite of all efforts to reduce it to priestly straightness, and a pair of light-blue eyes seemed intended by nature for laughter rather than the profound gravity which they expressed.

He was not left long alone. The door was soon again opened, to admit a lady ; a tall lady in a simple grey tea gown, which fell round her in straight, yet becoming folds. Her dark, almost black hair was parted and drawn back loosely into a thick coil, its own richness forming a sufficient coiffure. She had a fine, expressive face, brunette in colour, with very large hazel-brown eyes—brown with a tinge of red in it—heavy white-lidded eyes, which could glance up at times with startling fire. Her smiling, red-lipped mouth had a suspicion of dark down at the corners, and, parting to utter words of welcome, showed a range of dazzling white teeth, the upper row divided slightly but distinctly in the centre. She might be twenty-five, she might be thirty—she was indisputably in the earliest stage of her perfect prime.

"How kind and good of you to call, Mr. Granard," she said, holding out her hand, a long white, capable-looking hand. "How did you find me out?"

"I met Stephen Ferrars yesterday," he returned, shaking hands with her, "and he mentioned that you were in town ; so, as I had some tidings for you, I thought I would seek you in your former abode."

"I am amazed that the supreme Mr. Ferrars remembered the existence of so insignificant an individual as I am," she returned with a quick, questioning glance. "What brought *him* to town in the midst of the hunting season?"

"He is on his way to Paris, to escort my sister home."

"Ah!" The expression of this "Ah!" was more uneasiness than surprise.

"When does she return?"

"I do not know—it depends on my father's condition ; he is recovering, but is hardly strong enough for Claire to leave him."

"He has had a terrible illness," she spoke softly and sympathetically. "His recovery is wonderful at his age." A pause. "Now I am all curiosity to hear your news."

She sat, or rather sank, down on a hard, slippery, horsehair-covered sofa, as if it were the most luxurious couch, leaning her arm on its adamant cushion and her head on her hand, in an attitude of complete restful ease, which suggested the absence of steels in any part of her apparel and would have charmed a painter or a sculptor.

"I hope it may be good news to you, Mrs. Repton," returned her visitor, drawing a chair opposite and looking at her with interest not unmixed with apprehension. "When, some months ago, my sister introduced me to you, she mentioned (with your permission) that you would be glad of some appointment suited to an educated lady and a conscientious churchwoman. I think I have something to offer which is worth your consideration. A parishioner of mine, a wealthy unmarried lady, who has a fine old house in our remote neighbourhood, wishes to convert it into a home for penniless orphan girls of gentle blood, where they may be educated and fitted to earn their own living in various ways. The system will be partially conventual, but I need not now dwell on details. I think I could secure you the position of mother superior in this establishment; it would entail a good deal of responsibility and application, but you would have a comfortable home and a fair salary—a hundred and fifty pounds a year. I have already spoken of you to the foundress and secured her leave to make you the offer."

Mrs. Repton did not immediately reply; she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes for a moment; then she said in a low and slightly tremulous voice:

"How good you are! After my cruelly rugged life this thoughtful kindness seems to overpower me."

"It is, then, an employment that would suit you?—this, that I propose——"

"Admirably, if I suited it."

"I rejoice to hear you say so," warmly. "Of *your* fitness I have no doubt—therefore——"

"Mr. Granard—excuse me for interrupting you—but I am in a great difficulty, and I thank Heaven that I have you beside me to counsel and to guide. In any case I should take your advice; nature has bestowed the excellent gift of sound judgment upon you, and, apart from this, especial light must be given to your sacred office." She sat upright as she spoke, as if roused to energy, one fair hand outstretched and resting on the end of the black sofa.

"Speak to me with confidence," returned the young priest, his blue eyes growing soft and compassionate.

"You know," resumed Mrs. Repton, "that when in great distress last winter, my poor husband's sister, Mrs. Thorpe, offered me an asylum at Langford Grange—I say Mrs. Thorpe, for her husband's deplorable condition of semi-childishness makes her master as well as mistress. It was so far fortunate for me that I thus met your sister after years of separation and found a friend in her. To Mrs. Thorpe I was able to be of use; my knowledge of nursing proved a boon, and just before leaving her to come here Mrs. Thorpe pressed me so urgently to return to her, for three or four months at least, that in common gratitude I could not

refuse. I therefore gave a solemn promise to return. Can you absolve me from this?

"If properly represented to her, Mrs. Thorpe would not hold you to it—she would see that it was to your benefit that she should absolve you; and my duty as an adviser—I will not say a spiritual adviser—compels me to warn you that the Grange is *not* the best abode for you. For your sake, I must observe that Mrs. Thorpe's apparent neglect of her almost imbecile husband, her reckless riding to hounds while her son is wandering abroad and her daughter banished to school, does not elevate her in the eyes of—of her neighbours; while you, still young—and—of more than ordinary fairness" (the young man blushed, though he uttered the words with cold collectedness) "will possibly be classed with your relative in her reprehensible levity."

"My youth," returned Mrs. Repton with a sad smile, "was crushed to death long years ago. Believe me," she went on with soft earnestness, "believe me, Miriam—Mrs. Thorpe—is cruelly maligned; she does *not* neglect her husband; she is kind to him; but, used as she was to an out-of-door life, to be constantly on horseback (you know what a horsey set the Reptons are), she absolutely needs air and exercise to help her in her gloomy and fatiguing life; she is too regardless of appearances, and in this I hope to influence her—to make her home more homelike. It is far too depressing an abode for a girl of thirteen—Gertrude is much better at school. For myself, I really believe I can be of great use to Mrs. Thorpe, and have a softening influence upon her."

"Perhaps so," said Mr. Granard doubtfully. "But I should be sorry you lost the chance of such an appointment as I am empowered to offer you. The splendid air of the Yorkshire moors would invigorate you; the congenial task of training and forming young souls; seclusion from noisy, heartless, contaminating society; occupation, repose, security, and perhaps the occasional society of a spiritual friend, like myself, might heal your bruised heart, and lead to as much happiness as we may expect here below."

"It is indeed hard to turn from such a picture," said Mrs. Repton with a slight catch in her voice like a sob; "but can I, ought I, to desert my sister-in-law? May I not do a good work there too?"

"You best know your ground," said Granard drily. "What will you decide? A mother superior must be found, and that soon."

"Can you not give me ten days or a week to explain the position to Mrs. Thorpe and to make up my mind?" She clasped her slender fingers together and held out her hands to him with an imploring gesture.

Mr. Granard rose. "Yes, you shall have a week," he said somewhat stiffly. "When do you return to the Grange?"

"To-morrow! You are not angry with me?"

"Anger would ill become me," he returned gently. "You are the best judge of your own obligations; only such an opportunity may not again present itself."

"I know that well. Yet you would not have me throw off the friend who sheltered me in my hour of need, at the first gleam of better prospect?"

"Certainly not, if the case stands as you believe it does. Now I shall leave you. I return to Yorkshire to night; you have my address. Let me hear from you before the week is out."

"You shall, dear Mr. Granard; indeed you shall. I feel so reluctant to let you go. You do not know what a comfort, what a source of strength it is to talk to you, to listen to you. Let me send for a cab, it is raining heavily."

"Thank you. I shall find one as I go." And he was gone.

Mrs. Repton stood quite still after the door had closed, her hands clasped and dropped before her; an expression of profound thought darkening her countenance, a sombre far-away look stealing into her eyes. From this reverie or meditation she was roused by the entrance of an elderly woman in shabby black, a very shady white muslin cap covering her pepper and salt coloured hair, and a much, though not lately, washed Shetland shawl round her shoulders. She was stout and unrestrained in figure, but had the remains of good looks, and a curious vulgarized likeness to the handsome, graceful creature confronting her.

"Well, he did not stay long, dear."

"Long enough," returned Mrs. Repton dreamily, while she slowly unclasped her hands.

"And to think of his finding the place so bare, the table cover folded up, and not a bit of fire."

"It is no matter; the barer and more miserable my surroundings the better in this case," said Mrs. Repton quietly.

"Well, come down to the parlour fire now; it is bitter cold and damp, and the fire there is pretty good."

"Very well," and Mrs. Repton seemed to pull herself together; "and, Aunt Tony, can you give me give me some luncheon? I have a string of commissions to accomplish this afternoon, and nature requires support."

"Yes, I have a nice little cutlet for you and a roast tomato. Come, you are looking white with cold, and you are nothing without colour."

Mrs. Repton laughed, showing all her white teeth, and followed her aunt down stairs to one of those basement parlours not uncommon in suburban villas.

A bright fire was burning in the grate, and dingy red moreen curtains draped the door-window which led into the garden; a square piece of darned and torn carpet covered the centre of the

floor, the rest of which had been painted dark brown; a table covered with a much crumpled table cloth, and laid for dinner, with scanty ill-cleaned appliances for that meal, stood near the fire.

Mrs. Repton brought a chair and sat down at the place set for her, leaning her elbows on the table and her chin on her hands with a quick deep sigh.

"Yes, I know it is a miserable place for you, Eva, after the elegance you have come from. I wish I could give you more luxuries and niceties, but it has been a bad year with me, and as for even thinking of a new carpet——"

"It will always be a bad year with you as long as you go to bed early and get up so late, and put off things and cower over the fire as you do," interrupted Mrs. Repton abruptly. "But as for me, you need not apologize, my visits are very brief; still I am sorry to see you always out at elbows, for though I am able to help you a little this time, God knows when I can again. You are too much out of the way here. Why did you ever settle in this poky obscure dingy corner?"

"Well, dear, when I came here first it was considered at once rural and refined, and prices——"

"Well, now it is damp and deserted. I wish I could put you in a better place; perhaps you would rouse up then and make a fresh start."

"You are always kind and thoughtful for me. What brought that gentleman here this morning; was it any good?"

"I will tell you presently, but I will eat first, and very nice your cutlet smells. Whatever your shortcomings, Aunt Tony, your cooking is good." This, as the smutty girl brought in a weak tray bending under the weight of some plates and a couple of dishes. Moving two chairs together with her foot, she placed the tray upon them and proceeded to lift the plates.

"Gracious powers, Belinda, take care what you are about!" cried her mistress; "those dishes will be down and done for," and she started up to prevent the calamity.

"If there was a sideboard now," said Belinda reflectively.

"Sideboard, indeed! Where did you meet with a sideboard, I'd like to know? Go; have the eggs and parsley and all ready, and as soon as I have had a mouthful I'll come and make the omelette. I thought you'd like a savoury rather than a sweet, Eva."

"Thank you. I don't suppose that even in my baby days I ever cared for sweets. Your cutlets are excellent, Aunt Tony," and silence ensued whilst they discussed the viands before them. Then the elder lady departed and soon returned with an ethereal-looking omelette, which she divided with her *convive*. Though Mrs. Repton ate slowly and delicately, she evidently enjoyed her luncheon, yet her mind seemed preoccupied.

"I wish I had a nice glass of wine to offer you," said her

hostess. "I know you don't take ale. Now I find a little stout absolutely necessary."

"I do not take wine either," said Mrs. Repton.

"Well, I must say I do not think cold water wholesome. Why do you persist in taking it, Eva?"

"For two excellent reasons: consideration for my complexion, and because I like other beverages too well."

"Law, my dear, what nonsense."

"No, it is not nonsense; I am in a difficult crisis, and nothing stronger than water shall muddle my brains."

"Well, well," cried her aunt, who did not seem to care for the discussion, "that's your affair. You never told me what brought that gentleman here to-day."

"To make me what might be termed a sporting offer."

"An offer, my dear!" laying down her fork.

"Oh! Tony, Tony, the word 'offer' only suggests marriage to you," and Mrs. Repton proceeded to repeat the substance of her conversation with Mr. Granard.

"Why, Eva, it seems to be a good chance. A hundred and fifty a year ain't bad, when you have nothing to provide except a bit of dress."

"No; it would not do. I am much too round a woman for that square hole. Just think of the wild Yorkshire moors (it is somewhere near them), and the classes and the payers and the accounts." She shivered visibly. "No. I have other plans."

"I know how clever you are, but *can* you stay on at the Grange? It's all very well now."

"I *can* stay if I choose, but I do not intend to stay. I am working out a little scheme; at present it does not look very promising, yet I do not despond."

"How did you come to know this Mr. Granard? he is not much in your line."

"It is a long story. You remember when I was at school at Dresden? It was rather a miserable time; a pupil teacher's life is not too blissful. Among my schoolfellows was Claire Granard, a little quiet, plain, shy creature, the daughter of an Indian officer. At first I liked her well enough. You know I am good-natured."

Aunt Tony nodded.

"With all my ability, however—and I am *not* an incapable—Claire got ahead of me in some things; finally, and worst of all, our drawing-master, a splendid-looking Hungarian, with whom half the school, myself included, was in love, asked me to grant him a private interview. I managed it of course, but, when we did meet, the idiot made me the confidante of his respectful devotion to the sweet little English saint, my friend, and entreated my good offices. I soon put an end to that. Not long after I found an engagement in London, and you know how I met Jack: how I thought I had caught a sporting man of high position and

large fortune! How was I to know? Oh! my God! what a life I had with that man! He was not a bad fellow when sober, but he was a devil when he was drunk. Then his last illness!" She shuddered, and was silent for a moment. Her aunt shook her head sympathetically, then softly filled and emptied her glass.

"Well, when I joined the Thorpes I found their nearest neighbours were Lord and Lady de Walden, of Beaumont Royal. I had heard of the brilliant match Claire Granard had made, and soon managed to meet her. She was certainly gracious, but cold and calm as ever."

"It was rather a good find for you, I fancy, Eva."

"Well, yes, in more ways than one. You see, Mr. Thorpe is a new man in Blankshire. He bought Langford Grange since he was married. Then Miriam, my sister-in-law, is a Repton all over; she made the Blankshire squires and squiressees open their eyes very considerably, I assure you. Old Thorpe was not a bad sort, but he never found favour with the county; then he had that severe attack of gastric fever, and dwindled by degrees into a half-silly invalid; but Miriam never troubled much about him. When Jack died, I found among his papers a lot of letters tied up and labelled "correspondence respecting my sister." I first sent the packet to her, then she came to see me and was desperately anxious to know if I had read the letters. I assured her I had not, but I don't think she believed me—any way, she was very kind and liberal and asked me to stay with them; they were in town then. Some time after, she suggested that I might as well make the Grange my head quarters, and I have been there ever since."

"I wonder what was in those letters?"

"I really do not know; but they have been of use to me. Still my life at the Grange is uncertain and leaves much to be desired. But Lady de Walden's notice has strengthened my position. Then I have persuaded Miriam to be a little more circumspect, and am credited with *her* improvement. At Beaumont Royal, where I am occasionally invited, I was introduced to Lady de Walden's brother, Mr. Granard, and as I had duly impressed on her ladyship my honourable ambition to relieve my friends from the cost of my maintenance, his reverence promised to look out for me. I had no idea he would be so prompt; indeed he took me at a disadvantage this morning. Seriously, I could not well leave the Grange at a moment's notice; but, above all, I want to stay there."

"And no wonder. Why should not you gallop about and show off your fine figure on horseback and enjoy yourself?"

"Enjoy myself," repeated Mrs. Repton with bitter emphasis. "Do you believe I *ever* enjoy myself? When at any moment I may slip over the brink into an abyss of poverty. When I never dare utter an uncalculated syllable. When I am for ever on the strain to seize all possible advantages, and have to scheme and strive, and divine the foibles of my associates, that I may secure some

dry place for the soles of my feet, safe from the flood of failure, which, when a few years have tarnished my looks, will overtake me." She spoke with deep-suppressed passion that made her comfort-loving companion move nervously in her chair and relieve her feelings by a loud "hem."

"Never you fear, Eva," she exclaimed cheerfully; "a creature like you is sure to succeed. Why, haven't you beauty and cleverness and——"

A hard laugh interrupted her. "I begin to doubt if they count," said Mrs. Repton. "Look at my interesting playmate, Claire. She is small, slight, pale, with weak-looking, straw-coloured hair; silent, simple; her father was poor—poor for his station; the Granards are well born. But he lived on, his daughter had a respectable home, grand relatives trotted her out, and my Lord de Walden, a young wealthy baron of high degree, met her before he was blasé—fell in love with, and married her. Her luck is something preternatural! Lord de Walden is such a handsome fellow too, not in face perhaps, though that is not bad; but a great, tall, broad-shouldered, distinguished-looking man—rather red hair and complexion, pleasure-loving, and full of life; rides like a centaur and does not know what contradiction means; but a big boy after all. She might do what she liked with him."

"And doesn't she?"

"I don't know. I can't find out. He seemed very fond of her," she stopped abruptly.

"But, after all, you have never told me what really keeps you in this place, where you seem to have fallen on your feet."

"Do you think, Tony, I tell you *everything*?"

"No, dear, indeed I do not. Still, what you choose to tell me is quite safe."

"I believe that. I believe you are very true to me; you are the only creature that has ever been kind, disinterestedly kind, to me, and I will never forget it, though I am a bit of a free lance. Ah! as Becky Sharp says: What a good woman I could be if I had five thousand a year."

"A very sensible remark. Who is the lady, dear? I never heard you mention her before."

"Oh, a woman moving in the best society."

"Well, I should not have expected so much sense from her. So you are not going to tell me what your plans are."

"No," slowly and undecidedly. "Indeed they are scarcely laid—so much I will tell you, that among the people I met at Beaumont Royal is a certain Stephen Ferrars. He is cousin, first cousin to de Walden and very very rich; he rents a hunting box between the Grange and Beaumont Royal. Curiously enough, I used to know him in my husband's time. They had some dealings about horses; I think Jack tried to do him; but it is not easy to do Stephen Ferrars. He was very nice to me, very; though he is

not good-looking and is not generally amiable or agreeable, I liked him; his quiet respectful manner was balm to the bitterness that enwrapped me, the self-contempt, the hatred of my life. I thought he rather admired me; I was glad to meet him, but I have no idea how it may end."

"Well, I have. If you make up your mind, Mr. Ferrars will be nowhere."

"I wish I could agree with you, but there is another ingredient in the affair on which I will not say anything at present. Why, Tony, it is three o'clock, and the day closes so soon! I must run away and dress. Did you order a brougham? I cannot knock about in cabs such a day as this."

"I told Belinda to order one last night; but I really forgot about it this morning. Belinda, come here!" and a confused explanation arose.

Finally Mrs. Repton got all she wanted, accomplishing a large amount of shopping, and she wound up the day by treating her attached and sympathetic aunt to the dress circle at the Lyceum; where that kindly woman enjoyed shedding copious tears over the griefs of Olivia, and Mrs. Repton was saved by her preoccupation from being drawn into any talk about her plans.

The next day she left town in time to reach the Grange as the dressing bell rang.

## CHAPTER II.

### "SHADOWS."

A FEW days later October presented a less lugubrious aspect in the charming coquettish city by the Seine. There was even a brief spell of mid-day sun, which poured cheerfully into a comfortable bedroom, *au second*, in a quiet street opening from the Champs Elysées. If the furniture had lost its pristine freshness, it was clean and well preserved, and the only indication of a sleeping apartment was a large bed, the lace and satin draperies of which made it highly ornamental; otherwise, large easy chairs, a console and writing and other tables, vases of artificial flowers on the velvet-covered mantelpiece, and others real and delicately scented, from the hot-house, gave it the air of a *salon*.

In a *chaise longue*, his feet reposing on a hassock and carefully covered with a fur rug, reclined an elderly gentleman fast asleep. He was an aristocratic-looking man, with white hair and moustaches. On his head was a velvet cap, and beside him a small table, on which stood lemons, a *carafe* of water, a medicine bottle, the etceteras of carefully tended sickness.

The invalid was not alone. On a low seat near the window sat a young lady in black, a pale, girlish-looking woman with fair

hair, most simply dressed. She held some knitting in her lap, but she was not using her needles; she was lost in thought, and something like tears were in her eyes, which were fixed on the old man.

While she looked, one of the various doors opening from the room was moved very softly, and a stout pleasant-looking woman in a white cap and large white apron entered noiselessly and came close to the watcher.

"Madame," she whispered in French, "Monsieur your husband is arrived. He awaits you in the *salon*."

The pale face of her hearer flushed a delicate pink, and she started to her feet. One could see the pulse in her throat quivering.

"You will stay, my good Marie? Stay with him. He has been sleeping so tranquilly. I will come back soon—very soon," she said, and glided swiftly away.

"Ah!" sighed the French servant, or nurse, looking after her and then stooping to pick up the knitting, which had been dropped and forgotten. "The husband is perhaps still a lover, and her 'soon' will be far off." So saying, she resumed the seat just vacated and began to ply the needles busily.

Meantime the young wife sped along the corridor to a drawing-room at the further end, entering which she paused and looked round, for it seemed empty; then catching sight of a booted foot thrust forward from a chair, standing with its back towards her, she cried joyously, "Guy! my own dear Guy!" and darted forward.

At the sound of her voice, a man sprang up and came towards her; a tall distinguished-looking man, of any age from thirty to forty, with a dark rugged face, a large strong jaw and keen deep-set black eyes.

"I am infinitely sorry to disappoint you," he said with a smile which improved his countenance and showed his even white teeth, and he took her hand.

She turned deadly white, and trembled so perceptibly that her visitor laid his other hand over hers, as if to steady her as she cried, "Oh! where is he? Why did he not come? He is not ill—he is not—"

"My dear cousin, there is nothing whatever the matter with de Walden; but you know what a nuisance that agent of his makes himself, with leases and repairs and demands for improvements, &c. It would have been difficult for de Walden to get away just now, so he sent a very insufficient substitute—myself."

"Yes. Oh, I am very ungracious, Stephen; you are always kind and good to me; but she, Marie, said 'my husband' was waiting for me, and—and—I could not help being a little disappointed. You will forgive and understand me, Stephen?"

"I do. I *always* understand you, Claire," letting her hand go.

and drawing forward a chair into which she dropped, rather than sat down.

"But it is so strange that Guy should have sent you," she persisted. "Was it so *very* important—such pressing business that he *could* not get away? Even then—I could have waited a little. I said my father was so much better that I could leave next week, perhaps."

"Well, you see, I suppose de Walden is in a hurry to have you home again. You have been too long away, my dear Claire. It is not wise to let your husband find he can do without you," and he laughed a little harshly.

"What do you mean, Stephen? If he is so anxious to have me back, he has not found out he can do without me. I thought, too, that we might 'do' Paris a little together. Guy does not know Paris well, and I am very fond of Paris."

"I shall be very happy to 'do' the fair city with you, to any extent—and I know it well."

But Lady de Walden did not seem to hear him, she was thinking hard, struggling for self-control, and half ashamed of her own emotions.

That her husband should delegate the task of escorting her home to any one else seemed incomprehensible, but she must not be silly, she must not elevate some molehill of accident into a mountain of misfortune, and if he were so anxious for her presence as to send a deputy to fetch her, the sooner she went to him the better.

When she was quite sure of her voice, she said, "But you have not told me how my boy is. What ages it seems since I saw him!"

"Oh! Gerald. He is very flourishing, and sits his pony like a man already. He asked me when 'mother was coming back' as I was bidding him good-bye."

"My boy! my dear one! Is he much with his father?"

"No. It has been a wonderful season so far, and de Walden has hunted three or four times a week steadily. I was out pretty often, and we are all fascinated with your fair friend Mrs. Repton, who *can* ride. You know how I hate to see women in the field, what a nuisance I consider them; well, really, she is so thoroughly at home and able to take care of herself, that she's not a bit in the way."

"Indeed, she always was very brave. I wish I could ride to hounds, Stephen," a little wistfully.

"Never dream of it," he exclaimed. "To see *you* galloping across ploughed fields and flying over fences would be utter desecration."

"Still, I think Guy might like to have me with him."

"Not he. I mean—that he likes to think of the—the refinement which distinguishes you from other women."

"Refinement! no, cowardice," shaking her head. "I know plenty of charming women who hunt, and I should hunt fast enough if I had practice and nerve."

"I prefer you as you are; and now, tell me about General Granard."

"He has made a wonderful recovery; at one time he was in great danger, now the doctor hopes that in ten days or so he will be able to travel. I am very anxious to see him settled in his own abode before I leave him, so perhaps, if Guy does not mind waiting a little, he might have finished with those tiresome leases and things and come for me himself. Of course it would not be fair to keep you here all that time, when you must be longing for 'hound and horn.'"

"I am perfectly willing to stay, I assure you, if you will only make use of me; and you must remember that although Hawkins and his leases may be cleared off, the attraction of hound and horn remains for de Walden."

"Ah! yes, but mere amusement would not keep Guy," said Lady de Walden with a smile of tender certainty.

"Well, perhaps not; at all events I am here, at your service, for as long or as short a time as you like. In my opinion, the sooner you start the better; you are looking ill and worn: forgive a kinsman's plain speaking. You want air and exercise. Suppose you put on your bonnet and come out with me? We will drive to the Bois, take a brisk walk and return before your father can miss you."

She shook her head. "He never likes me to be away from his side, yet I can see he is trying to make up his mind to send me home—and I long to be there. However, I will go and see if he can spare me. I think I should enjoy a drive or walk with you, Stephen."

"Thank you. You can talk about de Walden and the boy all the time if you like."

"I am not quite so unreasonable. You would be bored."

"I confess the subject (for me) is not inexhaustible."

"You are always in the Palace of Truth, Stephen."

"That means I am anything but agreeable. Never mind. Tell me, how did the general manage to bring on this attack of bronchitis?"

"By rare imprudence. His old friend, Sir Frederic Carey, offered to join him in an excursion to Switzerland. (He always takes an autumnal trip, you know.) Sir Frederic is younger and stronger than my father, and induced him to walk too much; and one day, when very hot and tired, they crossed the Lake at Thun, and a shower came on. My father took cold, and, feeling ill, he hurried home. When he arrived here he was too ill to go further, and sent for me. That is more than five weeks ago."

"More than six weeks ago, you mean. Quite long enough to have deserted your husband."

"My dear Stephen, do not be more disagreeable than you can help. I will go and see if my father can spare me."

"My dear Claire, yours is a system which develops tyrants. I tremble to think of de Walden's future under your influence."

"You need not fear for him," she returned as she left the room.

"Is this boundless trust a goodly gift?" asked Stephen Ferrars of himself when he was alone. "I trow not." He paced once slowly to and fro. "She is no beauty," he mused; "that pale slight girlish creature. What is the secret of her charm?"

For Mrs. Repton's description of her friend was at once false and true. She had no regular beauty. Of barely middle stature, her slim willowy figure gave the idea of greater height. She was colourless. Yet the delicate fairness of her skin looked perfectly healthy. Her mouth had something of a pathetic curve, and the lips, though soft and sensitive, were not full. Her eyes were really of a light clear grey, very steady and thoughtful, but so well shaded by black lashes that most people considered the eyes themselves dark. Her great beauty was her hair—fine, long, abundant fair hair; not colourless fair hair, but reflecting the light in red golden gleams that gave a sort of glory to her small classic head. Her long tresses were usually twisted in a roll from the *nugue* to the crown, where a dark tortoiseshell comb upheld the weight of the rich coils. Her voice was very musical, but not without its commanding tones; and her manner, languidly gentle as it was, could be deeply earnest at times.

Her dress had of late always been black, for some eighteen months before she had lost a sweet baby girl, and she was but slowly recovering from this bitter grief. There was a wonderful but perfectly refined simplicity about her manner, her dress, her tastes; yet the young Baroness de Walden was sought and admired by the most worldly and brilliant of society during her brief visits to London in the season, for her husband was a thorough-going country gentleman, devoted to field sports and enjoying the excitement of every game which was flavoured with a spice of danger.

A more exquisitely happy life no woman could have known till the first breath of sorrow chilled and darkened its surface when she lost her little daughter. This grief bent her to the ground. She seemed for awhile to lose her interest in all pursuits and amusements, even in those which she shared with her husband.

For several months she moped and mourned, until serious remonstrance from her brother woke her from her sad lethargy, and she made a languid attempt to take up her former habits of outdoor occupations and keen interest in her husband's tenantry.

Ferrars stood staring vacantly through the window in deep thought; how long he did not know, for he was scarcely conscious where he stood, until the door, reopening to admit Lady de Walden, roused him.

"My father is awake and would like to see you," she said. "Then I will go out with you. I feel I should enjoy the air." Ferrars followed her to the invalid's room.

General Granard was sitting upright in his chair and seemed quite alert: a handsome man of perhaps sixty-five, though looking wan and worn from the effect of illness.

"Delighted to find you so nearly yourself again, general," said Ferrars cordially. "I expected to see something of a wreck, but I protest you look as young as ever."

"Not quite, my dear boy, not quite," shaking hands with him feebly; "but I hope to totter on for a few years longer. As long as I can be of use to any one, I am content to stay here below. Very glad to see you, Ferrars. So you have come to carry off the best little nurse any old fellow could have. Why couldn't that lazy husband of hers come for her himself? Too much engrossed by business and sport, eh? Ah! you young men are not the *preux chevaliers* we were in my day. Sport and money-making and anything diverts you from your devoir to your wives and lady-loves."

"I do not think money-making interferes much with de Walden's devotion to his wife," returned Ferrars laughing. "However, I am here to do Claire's bidding, and escort her home as soon as you can spare her."

"I suppose I must let her go sooner or later; but I should like her to wait until I am able to travel too. I am sure de Walden will see that it would be cruel to take my dear child from me before I am settled in my own den, where, if I am lonely, I am at least comfortable."

"Of course, my dear sir, de Walden would never be guilty of anything so brutal; besides Claire would not hear of it and you will be quite 'fit' in a few days."

"Yes, thanks to a sound constitution, an unusually sound constitution. There's Carey, who looks on me as an old fogey and rushes about from post to pillar; I doubt if he'd have come out of such a bruise as I have had with the last enemy under such flying colours as I sport. No, there's life in the old dog yet. Well, I am sure you are an excellent fellow to come away in the midst of the hunting season to play the good Samaritan. You just make yourself comfortable here for a few days till I get leave to travel and then you'll be a great help to me and to Claire on the journey."

"Very well, general. I am quite at your disposition."

"Claire says you want her to go out. I don't mind. You can tell me the news while she puts on her bonnet. The last thing I heard before I was laid up, was that Thurston had been black-balled at the United Service Club. What is the truth of the story?" And Ferrars, acknowledging his ignorance of elderly club politics, plunged into as much "great Babylon" gossip as he

could remember, exerting himself to amuse and cheer the invalid with an amount of kindly effort of which few of his associates would have thought Stephen Ferrars capable.

Lady de Walden was not long in making her toilette, and having left Madame Marie in charge, and all possible comforts at hand should the patient need them, she set forth with her husband's kinsman to enjoy the air from which she had been so long debarred.

"Are you well wrapped up?" asked Ferrars as they sallied forth. "If so, we will take one of those little open carriages. You will enjoy it more than being shut up."

"Oh, yes; ever so much more. How delicious the air is. There's just a touch of crisp frost in it that braces one delightfully. I know exactly how Beaumont Woods are looking, and that beautiful crimson creeper on the west front. Oh! how I should enjoy being out of doors once more if——" She stopped abruptly.

"*Ingrate!*" exclaimed Ferrars with a short laugh. "If de Walden were here instead of your present devoted slave?"

"Do forgive me, Stephen. Of course I would prefer Guy to any one, but *after* him I am best pleased to be with you."

"A long way after him, I suspect," returned Ferrars smiling as he hailed a *fiacre*.

"Oh, do not let us measure distances, Stephen. I am going to be happy and to get quite strong and well and bright before I return home, or my extra pale cheeks will frighten Guy."

"A sound conclusion," returned Ferrars as he handed her into the carriage. "Au Bois de Boulogne, Avenue des Acacias," to the driver, as he took his place beside her, and leading the conversation to her home, her boy, and the subjects connected therewith, he managed to interest and amuse her during their expedition, watching carefully that she should not allow the fur to fall from her throat or her cloak to become unclasped, and lavishing small thoughtful attentions upon her with the grave care of an elder brother. But the sun began to sink, and Lady de Walden was soon weary from her unwonted exertion, so they drove homewards. The air and movement restored her natural healthy tone of mind, and the sense of bitter disappointment which had stung her a couple of hours before now seemed foolishly exaggerated as she endeavoured by animation and sympathetic talk to atone to Ferrars for the ungraciousness of which her conscience accused her.

As they passed the Barrière de l'Étoile silence succeeded the laugh which Ferrars had evoked by a droll anecdote. When following a probably unconscious train of thought, Lady de Walden exclaimed, "And Mrs. Repton is still staying on at the Grange?"

"She is, and I must say she seems to be imparting some sense to that simpering idiot, Mrs. Thorpe."

"I cannot think it is a satisfactory abode for her."

"Far from it. But then it is a choice between the Thorpes' roof and no roof at all. Besides, there is some chance of her picking up a husband at the Grange. I fancy if she had even twopence-halfpenny a week to live on she would forswear matrimony after the experience she had of it. The late lamented Repton was a brute."

"Poor Mrs. Repton. What a destiny! But, Stephen, I don't like to hear you speak so scornfully of her."

"I do not speak scornfully of her. I admire her very much. When I first met her she had not long been married, and I was considerably smitten, only I was always far too virtuous a fellow to cast sheep's eyes at my neighbour's wife. Then her interesting husband very nearly did me about a horse, so I took the hint and sheered off. I didn't know *you* were fond of her."

"But I am not, though I like her better now than I used. When we were at school together some of the girls were quite fond of her. She was rather good-natured, but I felt she did not like *me*, and that is an impression which checks one's own liking. Now I am sorry for her, and she is *so* handsome."

Ferrars looked very steadily at his companion with a curious, questioning expression.

"Then I think she likes *you*, Stephen; she always seems to brighten when you begin to talk to her, so you ought not to be unkind."

"Likes me!" repeated Ferrars with his hard laugh; "she likes me very much. She would marry me to-morrow if I asked her."

"Stephen, you make me blush for you. How can you speak of a lady in such a way?"

"Why not? I mean nothing derogatory to her. I do not mean to insinuate that she is wildly devoted to me. I am quite sure that were I dead and in my grave, and Dick, Tom, or Harry reigning in my stead, she would marry any one of the three quite as willingly."

"I do not think you know how disagreeable you are when you adopt that tone of imitation cynicism, for if it were real I could not like you as well as I do."

"Well, I do not deserve your castigation. I do not see what Mrs. Repton can do except to land a big fish: she cannot dig; to beg, at least in the ordinary acceptation of the word, she is ashamed."

"No; there you are wrong. Mrs. Repton is anxious to dig, for when I suggested that my brother should try to find some suitable employment for her she was *so* grateful."

"Ah, indeed! time will show. At all events, she is a handsome, agreeable woman, with lots of pluck, or she never could have

lived through her married life. And, for my part, I wish her success and a good find—poverty must be a terrible thing to a pleasure-loving, luxurious woman like your fair friend. I don't blame her for trying to 'better herself,' as the servants say."

"Ah, yes, it must be dreadful to be really poor. I am afraid I do not feel enough for others; I am so happy and well off myself. But to make of marriage a mere means for living well and luxuriously is—shameful."

"I don't see it. What the deuce is a penniless woman to do?"

This question brought them to General Granard's residence, and as the carriage stopped a young lady came out from the porte cochère.

"Oh, Lilly, I am sorry to have missed you. Will you not come back with me?" cried Lady de Walden.

"Thank you, I cannot; I have divers places to go to. I have left a few flowers for the general, and if I may look in to-morrow evening I should be so glad. I want a little advice from you."

"Very well, dear, to-morrow at seven."

They shook hands cordially, and the girl walked swiftly away.

"Who is she in the name of all that's eccentric?" asked Ferrars. His question was not unnatural, for the young lady was rather remarkable. She had a garment of dark blue serge, which fell in pleats from her neck to her heels behind. A piece of the stuff was folded on her left shoulder and draped across the front to the right side, leaving an underskirt of red cashmere visible; a good deal of fuzzy dark hair escaped from a baggy head gear of blue velvet gathered into a band of gold braid, which gleamed among the curly locks which rebelled against its pressure; below was a rather piquant *retroussée* face, very pale, but smiling as she spoke and brightened by a pair of soft dark eyes of no particular colour.

"Democracy must have changed the taste of the Parisians, or she would be mobbed."

"These Parisians have improved in manners," returned Lady de Walden; "and habit has accustomed them to the curious fashions of English and American artists. That young lady is a great friend of mine. She is terribly poor, yet, Stephen, I do not think the wealth of an empire would tempt her to marry a man she did not love."

"How can you be sure of that, Claire?"

"I am sure."

### CHAPTER III.

#### HOME.

HAVING once surmounted the danger of his illness, General Granard made rapid progress and grew quite eager to be settled

in his own quarters, a small, prettily-decorated flat in a new Queen Anne style of mansion in the neighbourhood of Kensington Gore. Here, with the help of a severe elderly cook, and an ex-corporal, formerly of his own regiment, now elevated to the rank of body-servant, the general made a very comfortable home. Within a shilling fare of his club and easy reach of Kensington Gardens, when he wished to bask in the spring sunshine with one or two acquaintances among his fellow *locataires*, who formed a whist party in the winter evenings, amply supplied with the products of the Beaumont Royal flower and fruit gardens, its preserves and moors, the veteran led a tranquil and honoured existence in the happy halls of "The Palace Mansions." Both his children provided for, no cares disturbed the evening of his life. Moreover, he had the further satisfaction of believing that all the prosperity which gathered round his declining years was amply deserved—the reward of exceptional merit.

He had begun life with little beyond his commission, but his good looks and pleasant manners won him a pretty wife with a tolerable fortune, who thought herself the luckiest of women, and never disobliged her admirable husband till cholera proved too much for her and she was compelled to leave her little daughter on his hands before she was old enough to take care of herself.

Female friends, however, came to the rescue of the interesting widower, and relieved him from the woeful care of "a mitherless bairn."

So Claire was looked after and finally sent to the German establishment, where she made Mrs. Repton's acquaintance.

When the general got his rank and returned from India, he found a sweet companionable daughter. By no means pretty according to his ideas, but "a gentlewoman, sir! a gentlewoman right through," as he explained to his friend, Sir Frederic Carey.

Pretty or not, Claire Granard, the second year after her father's return, met Lord de Walden. He was *the* match of the season—youth, wealthy, the representative of an ancient line, and entirely his own master. Something—heaven only knows what—in Claire touched "the electric chain with which we are darkly bound." He fell passionately in love, and after a few months of very ardent wooing the pair were united at the ripe ages of eighteen and twenty-six.

"Most extraordinary thing, sir!" the general used to observe to his special friends. "He might have had the pick of England—indeed, I might say of Europe—yet de Walden takes to my little girl—an angel, sir! an angel of goodness—but nothing to look at—not a patch upon her poor mother at the same age."

From the date of this happy union the general was in clover. The income which barely sufficed for his needs when he had a daughter requiring dress and some social chances, was ample now

that he was alone; while the reflected glories of his son-in-law's rank encircled him with a halo of distinction.

Ten days after the appearance of Ferrars on the scene, the doctor gave his permission to prepare for the journey.

During this time Lady de Walden found her husband's kinsman a great help in many ways. He was always ready to do her errands—to walk with her, drive with her, do anything and everything for her in a quiet matter-of-course way that made her accept it all very much as if he were an unprofitable servant who only did his duty.

Latterly, General Granard was able to put off his invalid habits and dine with his daughter at six o'clock, at which meal Ferrars often joined them, remaining for a little confidential talk with Lady de Walden after the old man had retired for the night. Sometimes Ferrars dined with acquaintances whom he encountered at his hotel, but he rarely failed to look in afterwards at the Rue de G—, to ask for the general, to ascertain what Claire's plans were for the morrow.

In her private *salon* at the *pension* where General Granard had taken up his abode before his illness had declared itself, Lady de Walden was engaged in some elaborate fancy work one wild blustering evening after her father had retired.

She was not alone; at the other side of the work-table sat the same young lady who had left flowers for the invalid the day Ferrars arrived. She had evidently paid some attention to her toilette, for she wore a white muslin polonaise over a black alpaca skirt; she had a black sash and a few blossoms of red geraniums at her throat, while her hair, which she wore short, was divided on her brow and brushed back in a little less tangled condition than usual.

She was sitting on a low seat, apparently lost in thought, her hands clasped round her knee.

"I suppose it is very wicked to rejoice in what causes suffering to others," she said at length; "but the general's illness has been a bit of luck for me. I have had a chance of seeing you nearly every day; if he had not been ill, you would have been away in England and have forgotten my existence."

"Nonsense, Lilly! Do I ever forget you?"

"Well, no; not in essential things, though you do not care for me as I care for you. But I am unreasonable. You have your husband, your father, your boy to love, and I have no one—no one except yourself."

"Why, Lill, you told me you had many kind friends."

"Yes, I have—then they are outside friends. I can tell every thought of my heart to you. I wish you had not married Lord de Walden—it seems to put you so far away. There, I am unreasonable; I know it. I have felt so cross ever since that Mr. Ferrars came."

"Why, what has he done to vex you?"

"He—he has existed," cried Lillian and laughed naturally and frankly. "He is always here, and I cannot talk comfortably to you when he is by; and *he* wishes me anywhere—in the Red Sea or in a hotter place. Oh, I know it. I am not particularly glad when Lord de Walden is with you, but he is always kind and good-humoured."

"Yes, he is so bright and generous," remarked Lady de Walden musingly. "But tell me, Lilly," she resumed after a moment's pause, "is that Australian lady with whom you live not kind and friendly?"

"She is, indeed she is; but we are so very different in many ways that I cannot confide in her quite. Then I have only lived with her for six months."

"She seems to me, from what you say, a clever, bright woman."

"Yes, most interesting and amusing—only she is not *you*!"

Lady de Walden laughed.

"That is undeniable. Well, Lillie, when the holiday time comes you must pay me a long visit—and paint my picture, and Gerald's, and immortalize the beauties of Beaumont Royal. It is full of beauty; I cannot tell you how I love it. I pine to return there."

"I am not sure I should like to visit you—I should not feel at home in a house like that. And then my dress——"

"That can easily be arranged. I think you would enjoy a stay with us."

"With you—yes—if I might establish myself in one of your keepers' lodges, and wear "hodden grey" morning and noon; but for the life of a grand seigneur I am quite unfit."

"We shall see," began Lady de Walden, when Stephen Ferrars walked in unannounced.

"You are late, Stephen," said Lady de Walden; "what has become of you all day?"

"I have been on duty. I met Felton—the curate, you know, at Edenborough. He wanted some information I was able to procure for him, and we had a long talk. Unusual period of the year to meet wandering curates. And what does the doctor say as to the journey?"

"Oh, thank heaven! we may travel on Thursday unless the weather is very stormy."

"That's well," and he fell into thought, having duly recognized Lady de Walden's guest.

"Did Mr. Felton mention any Edenborough news?"

"Yes, that is—Beaumont Royal is flourishing, and its masters, present and future, well."

"It is late, Lady de Walden; I must say good-night."

"François will get you a *fiacre*," returned Claire; "ring, Stephen, please—and wrap yourself up well, Lilly. I will pay

you a visit to-morrow and bring Mr. Ferrars with me. He is a great connoisseur."

Lady de Walden went to the door with her young friend and kissed her affectionately, charging the waiter who came at her summons to see the lady had a steady driver.

"What a sensible young woman to take herself off. One might imagine she divined my preference for a *tête-à-tête* with you."

"She does," said Lady de Walden quietly. "She has just told me she *felt* you wished her at the bottom of the Red Sea."

"Oh, any sea would do—I am not particular."

"Why should you dislike an unoffending girl?"

"Exactly. Unoffending girls are just what I do dislike, but I thought I masked my batteries better."

"You are tolerably inscrutable, but you cannot fence yourself against instinct, and she is very instinctive on some sides. Now, for a penance you shall come with me to her studio to-morrow; you shall buy one picture and give her a commission for another."

"What have I done to be so punished? Nevertheless, if it will make my peace——"

"Whether it does or not, you must obey me."

"Certainly. Why are you so deeply interested in this girl?"

"Her mother was a friend of my mother, my father's godchild. Long ago, when she was a little thing of twelve or thirteen, an orphan and nearly penniless, some people applied to Mrs. Ardell, with whom I used to live when my father was in India, about a subscription for her; then she used to come for her 'days out,' when she was at school in an institution. Then somebody died and left money—not much—which would have been her father's had he lived, and the general assisted in getting it for her, so she has something to live on. She has a great taste for art, and as she has no regular guardian, does much what she likes and is working here. I was always fond of her—she is so honest, so true-hearted and independent. You will come with me to see Lillian Sandys to-morrow?"

"I will," shortly and emphatically. There was a moment's silence, then Ferrars asked in an absent, dreamy way, "Has de Walden written?"

"Has he written?" she repeated in a surprised tone. "Yes, of course, he has written regularly—not as often as I do, but then men always hate writing, and it seems Hawkins has been unusually troublesome—wanting Guy's authority about every trifle—that it quite takes up his time and worries him."

"Yes, I told you so."

"He says I shall find the boy quite grown. How enchanting it will be to go home, to see——" She stopped abruptly. Ferrars did not speak, he seemed in deep thought, his eyes evidently gazing at something far away. Then he roused himself and drawing

a chair beside her, began to talk of their journey and discussed its details. His thoughtful consideration for her own and her father's comfort struck Lady de Walden as most remarkable in a cold and, as was usually believed, a hard man, and when at last they had exhausted the subject, she exclaimed after a short pause :

"How very good you are to me, Stephen ; and let me confess my sins. When I first met you, before I was married, and Guy introduced you as his guide, philosopher and friend, as well as his cousin, I did not like you at all. You seemed harsh and cynical ; it struck me you despised Guy for loving me so much, and I was a little afraid of your contemptuous eyes, or rather, I was angry at their expression. I am not much given to fear. Now I am quite as fond of you, as Guy is. You are more like a brother to me than my real brother." She held out her hand to him with a tender glance and kindly smiling lips ; Ferrars took and held it for half a minute, releasing it almost before she made a movement to withdraw.

"Thank you," he said more coldly than was quite sympathetic she thought, and the idea of seeming weakly sentimental in his eyes brought the colour to her cheeks.

"Still you are too cynical, Stephen, though *I* have no right to say it. I wish you had a nice sweet loving wife ; there is nothing so happy as a happy marriage. Are you too cynical and sceptical to love, Stephen ?"

"No !" he exclaimed with startling energy. "I wish I were. I may trust you, Claire, and it is a sort of relief to tell you. There *is* a woman I have loved for years ; how well, heaven or the other place only knows."

"Why don't you marry her, Stephen ?" with deepest interest.

"Because she does not love me."

"Does she love any other man ?"

"I fear so."

"Do I know her ?"

"No," most emphatically.

"Try and put her out of your mind, Stephen."

"Easier said than done, my dear Claire," he returned grimly. "Besides, I have just a gleam of hope. There is a chance she may quarrel with the other fellow. I can wait, I can bear tortures, if only in the end I can win heaven."

"I think you are rather a formidable personage, Stephen ; could you be a cruel husband ?"

A wonderfully tender smile transfigured his dark face.

"I think not, Claire," he said ; "at any rate not to her, and the other fellow is not worthy of her. If, if, she should ever find him out. But I must not let myself dream or hope——" he stopped.

"I do wish you all success and happiness, Stephen. If the other man is not worthy—Oh ! I do hope you may win her."

Ferrars turned quickly. "Your hand on it, Claire," he said,

holding out his own; she put hers into it. This time he held it for a second or two in so strong a grasp that Lady de Walden's rings pressed painfully into her soft flesh and she uttered a little cry.

"Have I hurt you? What a brute I am," cried Ferrars remorsefully; "let me look."

"No, it is nothing; it is over now; but you were most energetic," and she laughed pleasantly. "I believe the thought of being once more at home would give me courage to bear and to forgive most things." To this Ferrars made no reply; in a short half-hour, during which he was very silent, he bid her good night.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was a soft grey afternoon early in November when, having seen her father comfortably settled in his own abode, Lady de Walden gazed with moist eyes, moist with happiness, from the window of the railway carriage at the increasingly familiar scenes through which she was passing swiftly, by the express which left London at an early hour in the morning. She wanted to reach home by daylight, to feast her eyes on the trees, the river, the grassy slopes, the many familiar beauties which made that home so charming.

The air was so profoundly still that the smoke from the cottage chimneys hung over the roofs in blue curls. As she neared the little station of Beaumont, she knew to whom each cottage belonged, the condition and prospects of each humble householder; with what pleasure she looked forward to visiting them again: they were all personal friends. But these were only passing thoughts; the deep joy which filled her heart to bursting and made her nerves quiver was the meeting so close at hand with de Walden.

They had never been separated for so long a period since their marriage.

It was nearly two months since he had escorted her to Paris, returning almost immediately to his country life. How nice and pleasant he had been, and how weak and unreasonable it was of her to feel the degree of disappointment she did, when she found he had sent Ferrars to fetch her. After six years of marriage she must not expect those lover-like attentions; ought she not to be thankful that he was so kind and affectionate and considerate a husband? Romance lasted longer with women than with men. *He* was still her hero. Then beyond him, also waiting for her, fancy pictured her boy, her dear bold beautiful boy, and even while she smiled at the anticipated meeting the tears stood in her eyes at the thought of the sweet baby girl, the touch of whose rosy lips she should never feel again.

"We are almost at home," she exclaimed to Ferrars who had been sitting with apparently closed eyes and very silent, in the corner furthest from Lady de Walden.

"Yes; they are slackening steam," he returned raising himself, and moving to the seat opposite to her, he looked out towards the station.

"Do you see who is waiting for us?"

"No, there is a bend in the line; I can't make out." He leaned back and watched her furtively. Another minute and they stopped. A well-known face appeared at the window, it was not de Walden's, it was the footman who usually attended Lady de Walden when she went out alone. The regulation immobility of the British "John" was for once disturbed. The man smiled a well-pleased smile as he touched his hat. "How do you do, John?" said Claire kindly as she stepped on the platform, and looked round with sudden chilling paralyzing disappointment.

The station-master was bowing; the porters touching their caps ran to get out her luggage; above the low wall beside the station, she could see the old coachman's jovial red face, even the horses' ears; but her husband, there was no sign of him! the shock was so great that she did not remember to miss the boy and his nurse.

"Lord de Walden is not ill, I hope?" she said to the footman.

"Oh! no, my lady, his lordship went off rather early to the meet this morning. I heard him say to Mr. Roberts that he would be round in time by the station. Shall I look if he's coming, my lady?" and without waiting a reply the eager "serving man" disappeared through the booking office.

"If he set out to hunt first, there is no knowing how far he may be led," said Ferrars offering his arm, for Claire had turned so deadly pale he feared she might faint. "If he found himself near home, he is very probably awaiting you there; but as he is not here I will go with you to the house. I suppose my dog-cart is there, and can follow, for of course I do not intend to intrude myself on you to-day."

"Don't leave me now, Stephen," murmured Claire clinging to him; "no doubt Guy *is* waiting for me at home." She got into the carriage, and spoke no more till they reached the house.

The station was nearly two miles distant from Beaumont Royal, including the avenue, after passing the gates. The land sloped gently upward towards a chain of hills, on an outlying spur of which the mansion stood. It was a comfortable, handsome, but not splendid residence of the Queen Anne period, with a couple of terraces one above the other, over-hanging the approach, and in their turn dominated by a range of windows commanding a fine view of the broad rich plain which spread smiling below. Behind, the ground sloped more steeply to a wooded eminence crowned by the grey stern ruins of the Norman fortress, built by the original de Walden, whose descendants rose to power under King John. His lands had spread widely over the district, where his latest descendants still held the nucleus of his vast estates. The family fortunes had known many vicissitudes and their lands had dwindled.

The present proprietor, however, was the son of a wealthy heiress, and had had a long minority. He was, therefore, richer in funded property than in landed estate, and although he had a half-sister a good deal older than himself, there were no other children of the late lord's second marriage to divide his mother's wealth with him.

It was indeed a fair home, a noble inheritance, and on the whole Lord de Walden had not hitherto been an unworthy possessor. His estates were well managed, and poverty was little known among his tenantry. He was never long absent, and liked as a change from sport to ride about with his agent or walk with the bailiff and see for himself what was being done on his property. But he was extremely pleasure-loving, fond of excitement, and most popular among the racing, hunting men of the county; the mainstay of the county races, the chief supporter of the local cricket club, and of all similar institutions.

The principal entrance door stood open when Lady de Walden drove up, and within several of the upper servants and the head nurse stood waiting to receive her. A sturdy fair-haired boy, already in knickerbockers, and looking more like seven than his real age of five, ran forward as she stepped from the carriage, crying, "Mother, dear mother!" Springing up, he threw his arms round her neck and hung there, her slight figure bending to his weight. She kissed him rapturously, forgetting for a moment in her son's caresses the absence of his father.

"Come, Gerald, you will break your mother's neck; won't you shake hands with me?" said Ferrars.

The child released her to give his hand for an instant to his kinsman; then, snatching it away, grasped his mother's in both his own and walked indoors with her.

"I am very glad to see you all again," said Claire, pausing and looking kindly round. "How well Master Gerald is looking, nurse; better, I think, than when I went away. I hope he has been a good boy?"

"A very good boy, my lady; and I am sure we are all glad to see your ladyship back again."

"I'll send you up tea directly, my lady," said the smiling housekeeper, "for you look very pale and fagged. Will you take tea in the library or your own room?"

"In the library, if you please." She spoke quite cheerfully, determined not to ask for her husband or seem to remark his absence, for that he had *not* returned to greet her was but too evident. "I shall be quite glad of a cup of tea. You can leave him with me, nurse," and still holding the boy's hand she walked from the entrance hall, down a corridor adorned with carved oak and inlaid cabinets, china vases and bronze figures, to the library, a beautiful lofty room, one side of which was occupied by a range of windows looking out upon the terrace. A bright fire burned in

an artistic grate, and pictures, busts, luxurious chairs, easels supporting portfolios of prints, and all possible appliances for study and writing abounded. A delicate scent of Russian leather perfumed the apartment, and the soft grey tone of the landscape without seemed in harmony with the spirit of repose pervading it.

"Is it not sweet and homelike?" exclaimed Lady de Walden as she sank into a chair near one of the windows and took the boy on her knee. "You are glad to have mother back, dear?"

"Oh! yes; so glad; and I have a new pony, such a pretty one, quite a frisky one; Rogers was afraid it would be too much for me, but I can stick on quite well. You will come and see it to-morrow morning, won't you, mother?"

"Yes, darling; I will go wherever you like. But," putting down the child and starting, "listen! Here is father, perhaps." She grew crimson, then deadly white. Ferrars, too, rose up, his face set with an expression of anxiety as the door was thrust open and a tall, broad-shouldered, fresh-coloured man with light-reddish hair and moustaches, blue-grey quick eyes and a fine carriage, came eagerly into the room. He wore his hunting garb, and his top-boots were thickly splashed with mud.

"My dear Claire, delighted to welcome you home again," he cried as he embraced her effusively. "So awfully sorry to be late, but the fox headed round by Lea Woods, and when I looked at my watch I found I had no chance of reaching the station. Why, Claire, you look like a ghost, and you are trembling; you are quite overdone. Here, sit down; ring the bell, Stephen; she wants something more than tea. The Beaumont breezes will soon set you up again. Glad to see you, Stephen; a thousand thanks for your good care of my wife," and he shook hands with his kinsman cordially. Then he insisted on his wife's taking some champagne, and showed her an example by swallowing two glasses himself.

A fire of questions followed, about the general, about the journey, about the weather in Paris, &c.

"Come to me, Gerald," holding out his arms; "you tire your mother."

The child hesitated, and then ran to Lord de Walden, of whom he was very fond. Jumping on his knee, he rested his fair head against his father's shoulder.

"Now that I have seen Claire safe in the bosom of her family I will retire," said Ferrars, who had not sat down again. "My dog-cart is here, and I daresay I shall see you to-morrow."

"What? Let you go home to your bachelor solitude after doing me yeoman's service! No, by George! you must stay here; you have your traps with you. Make him stay, Claire; he'll mind what you say; and to-morrow I want you to ride over with me to Edenborough. Speak to him, Claire."

"Yes, do stay, Stephen," said Lady de Walden, not too warmly; "you will be better here."

"Do you want a third at your board on your first meeting?" asked Ferrars with a peculiar, perhaps a sneering, laugh. "I shall feel in the way."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow; we are too old a married couple now to need *solitude à deux*. Eh, Claire?"

"Oh! yes, Stephen; I do wish you would stay," she returned with much greater cordiality. "He has been such a kind, good guardian, Guy; I am quite obliged to you for sending him. Now, I am sure that wine has gone to my head. I will go to my room and lie down for a little while. Will you come with mother, Gerald?"

"Yes," jumping down; "and won't you come too, father?"

"Presently, my boy; presently."

Taking her son's hand, Lady de Walden gave her husband a little nod and a pleasant smile as she left the room.

"She is looking awfully ill," exclaimed Lord de Walden as the door closed upon her.

"Do you think so? It is only the journey and the worry of settling the general, who, you know, likes his comforts. She was looking uncommonly well in Paris, and brighter than I have known her for some time."

"Ah! well, I am glad to hear it," returned de Walden in a changed tone.

(To be continued.)

LONDON LETTERS,  
TO VARIOUS COUNTRY COUSINS.

— — —  
No. VIII.

DEAR COUSINS,

My first business must be to wish you all a happy New Year. May those among you who object to *coiffer Sainte Catherine* find that terrible fate averted before the close of 1890; and may those to whom the idea of marriage brings no happy thoughts be shielded from matrimonial offers. There are girls whose thoughts are by no means set and fixed upon weddings and bridegrooms, though it seems difficult to convince men that such beings exist.

Having given you my New Year's greetings, I must remind you that this is the time for the formation of good resolutions. Some girls postpone them till their birthday, and when it arrives think that they will wait till the beginning of a new year. These girls never succeed in even formulating a good resolve. Others sketch out several, and perhaps keep one, or possibly as many as two. "Never to exceed one's dress allowance" is a good resolution to make. The very difficulty of keeping it turns it into an excellent moral exercise. Country girls are more blessed than town girls, because they are not exposed to the terrible temptations of shop windows. Just now they are peculiarly attractive, being filled with New Year's gifts—beautiful furs, costly winter mantles, and most delightful evening dresses, besides a host of smaller articles that almost magnetize the money out of one's pocket. A good, though not entirely efficient, protection against temptation is to take out with us only just sufficient small change for the day's expenses. Even then, when the skilled window-dresser has made his goods look extraordinarily tempting, realizing the truth of Shakespeare's lines:

"How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds  
Makes ill deeds done"

the fell thought occurs, "Why not have the purchase sent home, and pay on delivery?" There is something particularly elusive about paying on delivery. It is almost as deceptive as getting

things on credit. One does not part at the moment of purchase with one's glittering coins of gold and silver, and "parting is such sweet sorrow" that it has a salutary effect upon all but the most wildly extravagant. It is extremely difficult to be thrifty and economical while one is young; but if we firmly resolve not to spend more money than we ought on our clothes, let us by all means cleave to our determination, whether we like it or not.

"Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra."

Another good resolution deals with getting up in good time in the morning. This seems easy enough overnight; but oh! how delicious are the stolen moments after we are called in the mornings. We have not been so comfortable the whole night long as we are just then. The environment of gentle warmth is a captivating contrast to the cold that we know is lying in wait for us directly we turn out. How short the minutes seem! They fly by us at a double *accelerando*, and when at last we take our courage in both hands and shake off the bonds of laziness, it is only to find that we have to make a hurried toilet, and even then are late for breakfast. To the well-constituted mind a hasty scramble to begin the day with is a very odious thing. Dignified leisure for the tub, the toilet and the early meal is a positive necessity. But then there are thousands of girls whose minds are not well-constituted, and who prefer a scurry and a rush to the loss of those comfortable five or ten minutes while their hot water is growing cold. They have not realized what a magic power there may be in the two words "I will," firmly uttered and fully meant. Try it, cousins. You will be astonished at the strength of resolution that the practice of this "I will" may develop in you.

There is further advice that I could offer you but that I fear to be condemned as prosy and preaching. I will, therefore, only warn you to avoid flirtations, never to dance more than three times in one evening with the same man, to come back to your chaperon in the intervals, and not to consume too many ices.

Dancing dresses are very pretty this season. If you have any rather elderly black ones, buy some scarlet velvet and have a new bodice made of it to wear with the black skirts. The sleeves must be quite four inches long, remember, for the "no-sleeves" are completely out of it this winter. Trail some poppies down the side of the skirt, and wear an aigrette of similar flowers in the hair. If you can afford it, buy a pair of the new evening gloves on which the floral embroidery goes round and round the arm in spirals ascending towards the shoulder. With scarlet silk stockings and shoes to match you will look delicious, and no one—not even your dearest friend—would ever dream of applying the terrible term *réchauffé* to so becoming a costume.

There are many wild ways of doing the hair to be seen just now in London society. Perhaps one of the wildest is to catch up a thick piece of hair on the crown of the head, tie it in a high, up-standing loop and fasten to it an aigrette of flowers. Then pile up all the rest of the hair about this central point in small coils and rolls. Another way, which breathes of eccentricity, is to divide the hair across the head from temple to temple, crimp all the front part in enormous furrows, tie the back portion down in a catogan with a bit of black ribbon, and then comb out the crimpings until they billow and breaker above the brows. These are two of the oddest of the coiffures I have lately seen. I must acknowledge that both possessed the indefinable quality of "chic," because arranged by an "artist in hair." A faulty copy might have lamentable results.

No one's toilet-table is now considered completely furnished without a box of manicure implements. There is quite a rage for the practice of this art, and many professors have found employment in London. The "manicure" has a serious sense of his duties to mankind, and he treats the human finger-nail with a deference equal to that with which a physician regards the entire anatomy. It is amusing to see the solemnity with which the various instruments are applied. They are ingeniously devised, there is no doubt, and nails that have been scraped, cut, and polished show a pink perfection of colouring and glittering surface. The fault of the manicure lies in making the nails too long and pointed. The perfect nail has a uniform depth of white margin at the outer edge, and the "claw" points are neither beautiful nor reasonable.

It is rumoured that the slow waltz is to become fashionable again this winter. It is a much more graceful dance than the *trois-temps* as performed by the majority of the guests at what the French call a *sauterie*. Though some can dance the quick waltz gracefully, the greater number make it into a rush, a twirl, and a wild scamper which leaves them breathless and unduly flushed.

It is also said that dear old Sir Roger de Coverley is to revisit the glimpses of the moon, or rather to become acquainted with the electric light of the modern ball-room. Let us hope it may out, at once and for ever, the too idiotic cotillion, with its silly figures. The change will be a delightful one.

C. E. H.

P. S.—By the time these words meet your eyes, the influenza epidemic will probably be among us, or if not here, at least upon its way. This is what to do to avoid its close acquaintance. Eat abundantly of green vegetables and consume black pepper plentifully with every dish. Partake freely of apples and oranges, both raw and cooked. If you feel languid and unstrung apply to the family medicine chest for a friendly dose. Keep your feet warm and be as cheerful as your symptoms will permit.

C. E. H.